# WEEDS

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*NEW YORK: ALFRED · A · KNOPF*

Baroja y Nessi, Pío

# WEEDS

BY

PÍO BAROJA

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH

By ISAAC GOLDBERG

NEW YORK

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# CONTENTS

## PART ONE


I The Studio—The Life Led by Roberto Hasting —Alex Monzón 3

II Señorita Esther Volovitch—A Wedding—Manuel, Photographer's Apprentice 23

III The "Europea" and the "Benefactora"—A Strange Employment 38

IV The Baroness de Aynant, Her Dogs and Her Mulattress Companion—Wherein is Prepared a Farce 54

V The Life and Miracles of Señor de Mingote—Wherein Beginneth the Succulent Exploitation of Don Sergio 68

VI Kate, The Palé Lass—Roberto's Love Affairs —Military Punctilio—Wicked Women—Anthropological Disquisitions 83

VII The Berber Feels Profoundly Anglo-Saxon—The Mephistophelian Mingote—Cogolludo—Kate's Departure 104


## PART TWO


I Sandoval—Sánchez Gómez's "Toads"—Jacob and Jesús 125

II The Names of the "Toads"—The Director of *Los Debates* and His Editorial Staff 138

# CONTENTS


III The Santa Casilda Hostelry—Jacob's History —La Fea and La Sinforosa—The Motherless Child—A not Very Merry Christmas 147

IV Roberto's Christmas—Northern Folk 163

V General Strike—Gay Times—The Dance at the Frontón—Initiation into Love 179

VI The Snow—More Tales from Don Alonso— *Las Injurias*—The *Asilo del Sur* 188

VII The Black House—Conflagration—Flight 211

VIII The Municipal Dungeons—The Returned Soldier—The Convent Soup 218

IX Night in the Paseo de la Virgen del Puerto— A Shot Rings Out—Calatrava and Vidal—A Tango by La Bella Pérez 229


## PART THREE


I Can Better Times Have Come at Last?—Vidal's Proposals 245

II El Garro—Marcos Calatrava—The Master— Confidences 259

III La Flora and La Aragonesa—La Justa—The Grand Opening of the Salón París 274

IV An Execution—On the Sotillo Bridge—Destiny 285

V The Police Court Dungeon—Digressions— Manuel's Statement 297

VI What Happened in the Judge's Office—The Chapter House 311

VII La Fea and La Salvadora—Ortiz—Old Friends 319

VIII On the Track of El Bizco—The Outskirts— The Ideal of Jesús 327

# PART ONE

# CHAPTER I

The Studio—The Life Led by Roberto Hasting—Alex Monzón

ROBERTO had got out of bed. Dressed in his street clothes, seated before a table heaped with documents, he was writing.

The room was a low-ceiled garret, with a large window that overlooked a patio. The centre of the room was occupied by two clay statues with an inner framework of wire,—two figures of more than natural size, huge and fantastic, both merely sketched, as if the artist had been unable to complete them; they were two giants exhausted by weariness, with small, clean-shaven heads, sunken chests, bulging stomachs and long, simian arms. They seemed crushed by a profound dejection. Before the wide window extended a sofa covered with flowered percaline; on the chairs and upon the floor lay statues half swathed in damp cloths; in one corner stood a box filled with dry bits of scagliola, and in a corner, a tub of clay.

From time to time Roberto would glance at a pocket watch placed upon the table amidst his papers. Then he would get up and pace for a while up and down the room. Through the window he could see tattered, filthy women moving

about in the galleries of the houses across the way; up from the street rose a deafening racket of cries from the huckstresses and the peddlers.

Roberto, however, was not at all disturbed by the continuous din, and after a short while would resume his seat and continue writing.

In the meantime Manuel was climbing and descending every stairway in the neighbourhood, in search of Roberto Hasting.

Manuel was inspired with the earnest resolution to change his mode of living; he felt capable now of embracing an energetic determination and carrying it through to the end.

His elder sister, who had just married a fireman, had presented him with a pair of torn trousers that her husband had discarded, an old jacket and a frayed muffler. To these she had added a cap of most absurd shape and colour, a battered derby and a few vague bits of good advice concerning industriousness, which, as everyone knows, is the father of all virtues, just as the horse is the noblest of animals and idleness the mother of all vice.

It is quite possible—almost certain—that Manuel would have preferred to these kindly, vague counsels, this cap of absurd shape and colour, this old jacket, this frayed muffler and the pair of outworn trousers, a tiny sum of money, whether in small change, silver or bills.

Such is youth; it has neither goal nor compass; ever improvident, it imputes greater value to material gifts than to spiritual, unable in its utter ignor-

ance to realize that a coin is spent, a bill is changed, and both may be lost, while a piece of good advice may neither be spent nor changed, nor reduced to small change, possessing furthermore the advantage that without the slightest expenditure or care it lasts forever, without mildewing or deteriorating. Whatever his preferences may have been, Manuel had to be satisfied with what he got.

With this ballast of good advice and bad clothing, unable to detect a gleam of light on his way, Manuel ran over mentally the short list of his acquaintances, and it occurred to him that of them all, Roberto Hasting was the only one likely to help him.

Penetrated with this truth, which to him was of supreme importance, he went off in quest of his friend. At the barracks they had not seen him for some time; Doña Casiana, the proprietress of the boarding-house, whom Manuel came upon in the street one day, knew nothing of Roberto's whereabouts, and suggested that perhaps the Superman would be able to tell.

"Does he still live at your place?"

"No. I got tired of his never paying his bills. I don't know where he lives; but you can always find him at the office of *El Mundo,* a newspaper over on the Calle de Valverde. There's a sign on the balcony."

Manuel set out for a newspaper office on the Calle de Valverde and found it at once. He walked up the steps to the main floor and paused before a door with a large glass pane, on which

were depicted two worlds,—the old and the new. There was neither bell nor knocker, so Manuel began to drum with his fingers upon the glass pane, directly upon the area of the new world, and was surprised in this selfsame occupation by the Superman, who had just come from the street.

"What are you doing here?" asked the journalist, eyeing him from top to toe. "Who are you?"

"I'm Manuel, Petra's son. The woman who worked at the boarding-house. Don't you remember?"

"Ah, yes! . . . And what do you want?"

"I'd like you to tell me whether you know where Don Roberto lives. I believe he's now a writer for the newspapers."

"And who is Don Roberto?"

"That blonde chap. . . . The student who was a friend of Don Telmo's."

"Oh, that lit'r'y kid? . . . How should I know?"

"Not even where he works?"

"I think he is an instructor at Fischer's academy."

"I don't know where that academy is."

"It seems to me it's on the Plaza de Isabel II," replied the Superman sullenly, as he opened the glass door with a latch-key and walked inside.

Manuel hunted up the academy. Here an attendant informed him that Roberto lived in the Calle del Espíritu Santo, at number 21 or 23, he

could not say exactly which, on a top floor, where there was a sculptor's studio.

Manuel sought out the Calle del Espíritu Santo; the geography of this section of Madrid was somewhat hazy to him. It took him a little time to locate the street, which at this hour was thronged with people. The market-women, ranged in a row on both sides of the thoroughfare, cried their kidney-beans and their tomatoes at the top of their lungs; the maidservants tripped by in their white aprons with their baskets on their arms; the dry-goods clerks, leaning against the shop-doors, swapped gossip with the pretty cooks; the bakers threaded their way hurriedly through the maze, balancing their baskets upon their heads; and the coming and going of the crowd, the shouting of one and the other, merged into a medley of deafening sound and variegated, picturesque spectacle.

Manuel, elbowing his way through the surging throng and the baskets of tomatoes, asked after Roberto at the houses that had been indicated; the janitresses, however, knew no such fellow, and there was nothing left but to climb to the upper stories and enquire there.

After several ascents he located the sculptor's studio. At the top of a dark, dirty staircase he stumbled into a passageway where a group of old women were chatting.

"Don Roberto Hasting? A gentleman who lives in a sculptor's studio?"

"It must be that door over there."

Manuel opened the door half way, peered in and discovered Roberto at his writing.

"Hello. Is that you?" greeted Roberto. "What's up?"

"I came to see you."

"Me?"

"Yes, sir."

"How are you getting along?"

"I'm at the end of my rope."

"What do you mean,—end of your rope?"

"Out of work."

"And your uncle?"

"Oh, it's some time since I left him."

"How did that happen?"

Manuel recounted his troubles. Then, seeing that Roberto continued rapidly writing, he grew silent.

"You may go on," murmured Hasting. "I listen as I write. I have to finish a certain assignment by tomorrow, so I must hurry. But I am listening."

Manuel, despite the invitation, did not go on with his story. He gazed at the two grotesque, distorted giants that occupied the middle of the studio, and was astounded. Roberto, who noticed Manuel's stupefaction, asked him, laughing:

"What do you think of it?"

"How should I know. It's enough to scare anybody. What's the meaning of those men?"

"The artist calls them The Exploited. He intends them to represent the toilers exhausted by their labour. The theme is hardly apt for Spain."

Roberto went on with his writing. Manuel removed his glance from the two huge figures and inspected the room. There was nothing sumptuous about it; it was not even comfortable. It struck Manuel that the student's affairs were not progressing very favourably.

Roberto cast a hurried glance at his watch, dropped his pen, arose, and strode around the room. His elegant appearance contrasted with the wretched furnishings.

"Who told you where I lived?" he asked.

"Someone over at the academy."

"And who told you where the academy was?"

"The Superman."

"Ah! The great Langairiños. . . . And tell me: how long have you been out of work?"

"A few days."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Whatever turns up."

"And if nothing turns up?"

"I think something will."

Roberto smiled banteringly.

"How Spanish that is! Waiting for something to turn up. Forever waiting. . . . But, after all, it's not your fault. Listen to me. If you can't find a place where to sleep during the next few days, stay here."

"Fine. Many thanks. And your inheritance, Don Roberto? How is it coming?"

"Getting along little by little. Within a year you'll behold me a rich man."

"I'll be happy to see the day."

"I told you already that I imagined there was a plot on the part of the priests in this affair. Well, that's exactly how the matter stands. Don Fermín Núñez de Letona, the priest, founded ten chaplaincies for relations of his bearing the same name. Knowing this, I inquired about these chaplaincies at the Bishopric; they knew nothing; several times I asked for the baptismal certificate of Don Fermín at Labraz; they told me that no such name appeared there. So, a month ago, in order to clear up the matter, I went to Labraz."

"You left Madrid?"

"Yes. I spent a thousand pesetas. In the situation I'm now in, you may easily imagine what a thousand pesetas mean to me. But I didn't mind spending them. It was worth it. I went, as I told you, to Labraz; I saw the baptismal register in the old church and I discovered a gap in the book between the years 1759 and 1760. 'What's this?' I said to myself. I looked; I looked again; there was no sign of a page having been torn out; the number of the folios was all in due order, yet the years did not agree. And do you know what was the matter? One page was glued to the other. Thereupon I proceeded to the Seminary of Pamplona and succeeded in finding a list of the students who attended toward the end of the XVIIIth century. On that list is Don Fermín, who signs himself Núñez de Letona, Labraz (Alava). So that Don Fermín's baptismal certificate is on that pasted page."

"Then why didn't you have the page unglued?"

"No. Who can tell what would happen then?

I might scare away the game. Let the book stay there. I have sent my script to London; when the letters requisitorial arrive, the Tribunal will name three experts to go to Labraz, and before them in the presence of the Judge and the Notary, the pages will be unglued."

Roberto, as always when he spoke of his fortune, went into an ecstasy; his imagination opened wonderful vistas of wealth, luxury, marvellous travels. In the midst of his enthusiasm and his illusions, however, the practical man would intrude; he would glance at his watch, at once calm down, and return to his writing.

Manuel arose.

"What? Are you leaving?" asked Roberto.

"Yes. What am I going to do here?"

"If you haven't the price of lunch, take this peseta. I can't spare more."

"And how about you?"

"I eat at one of my pupils' houses. Listen: if you come here to sleep, let my companion know beforehand. He'll be here in a moment. He hasn't got up yet. His name is Alejo Monzón, but they call him Alex."

"Very good. Yes, sir."

Manuel breakfasted on bread and cheese and within a short while returned to the studio. A chubby fellow with a thick, black beard, wearing a white smock, with a pipe in his mouth, was modelling a nude Venus in plaster.

"Are you Don Alejo?" Manuel asked him.

"Yes. What do you wish?"

"I am a friend of Don Roberto's, and I came to see him today. I told him I was out of work and homeless, and he said I might sleep here."

"You'll have to use the sofa," replied the man in the white smock, "for there's no other bed."

"That's all right, I'm used to it."

"So! Have you anything special to do?"

"No."

"Well, suppose you step on to the platform, then; you can serve as my model. Sit down on this box. So. Now rest your head on your hand as if you were thinking of something. Fine. That's excellent. Look up a bit higher. That's it."

The sculptor sat down, with a single blow of his fist smashed the Venus that he had been modelling, and began upon another figure.

Manuel soon grew weary of posing and told Alex, who said that he might rest.

In the middle of the afternoon a group of the sculptor's friends invaded the garret; two of them rolled up their sleeves and began to heap up clay on a table; one long-haired fellow sat down upon the sofa. Shortly afterward a fresh contingent arrived and they all began to talk at the top of their voices.

They mentioned and discussed a number of things, concerning painting, sculpture, plays. Manuel imagined that they must be important personages.

They had everybody pigeon-holed. So-and-so was admirable; Such-and-such was detestable; A was a genius; B, an imbecile.

Of a surety they had no use for middle tints and middle terms; they seemed to be the arbiters of opinion,—juries and judges over everything.

At nightfall they prepared to leave.

"Are you going out?" asked the sculptor of Manuel.

"I'll go out for a moment, just to get supper."

"All right. Here's the key. I'll be back around twelve, and I'll knock."

"Very well."

Manuel ate another meal of bread and cheese and then took a stroll through the streets. After night had fallen he returned to the studio. It was cold up there,—colder than in the street. He groped his way to the sofa, stretched himself out and awaited the sculptor's return. It was nearly one when Alex knocked at the door and Manuel opened for him.

Alex came back in an ugly mood. He went to his alcove, lighted a candle and began to pace about the room, talking to himself.

"That idiot of a Santiuste," Manuel heard him mutter, "says that not completing a work of art is a sign of impotence. And he looked at me as he spoke! But why should I pay any attention to what that idiot says?"

Since nobody could gave a satisfactory reply to the sculptor's query, he continued to measure the length of the room, bewailing in a loud voice the stupidity and the enviousness of his comrades.

Then, his fury abated, he took the candle, brought

it close to the group called The Exploited, and examined it for a long time minutely. He saw that Manuel was not asleep, and asked him frankly:

"Have you ever seen anything more colossal than this?"

"It's a mighty rare thing," answered Manuel.

"I should say it is!" replied Alex. "It possesses the rareness of all works of genius. I don't know whether there's anybody in the world capable of producing the like. Rodin, maybe. H'm. . . . Who can say? Where do you think I'd place this group?"

"I don't know."

"In a desert. On a pedestal of rough, unadorned, squared granite. What an effect it would produce. Hey?"

"I should imagine."

Alex took Manuel's astonishment for admiration, so, with the candle in his hand, he went from one statue to another, removing the cloths that covered them and exhibiting them to the boy.

They were horrible, monstrous shapes. Aged hags huddled together with hanging skin and arms that reached almost to their ankles: men that looked like vultures; hunchbacked, deformed children, some with huge heads, others with diminutive, and bodies utterly lacking proportion or harmony. Manuel wondered whether this mysterious fauna might be some jest of Alex's; but the sculptor spoke most enthusiastically of his work and explained why his figures did not possess the stupid academic correct-

ness so highly lauded by imbeciles. They were all symbols.

After this exhibition of his works Alex sat down in a chair.

"They don't let me work," he exclaimed despondently. "And it grieves me. Not on my own account. Don't imagine that. But for the sake of art. If Alejo Monzón doesn't triumph, sculpture in Europe will go back a century."

Manuel could not declare the contrary, so he lay down upon the sofa and went to sleep.

The following day, when Manuel awoke, Roberto was already dressed with finicky care and was at his table, writing.

"Are you up so soon?" asked Manuel, in amazement.

"I've got to be up with the dawn," answered Roberto. "I'm not the kind that waits for things to turn up. The mountain doesn't come to me, so I go to the mountain. There's no help for it."

Manuel did not understand very clearly what Roberto meant with this talk about the mountain; he stretched his limbs and arose from the sofa.

"Get along," said Roberto. "Go for a coffee and toast."

Manuel went out and was back in a jiffy. They breakfasted together.

"Do you want anything more?" asked Manuel.

"No, nothing."

"Don't you intend to return before night?"

"No."

"You have so many things to do?"

"Plenty, I assure you. At about this time, after having invariably translated ten pages, I go to the Calle Serrano to give a lesson in English; from there I take the tram and walk to the end of the Calle de Mendizábal, return to the heart of the town, go into the publishing office and correct the proofs of my translation. I leave at noon, go to my restaurant, eat, take coffee, write my letters to England and at three I'm in Fischer's Academy. At half past four I go to the Protestant colegio. From six to eight I stroll around, at nine I have supper, at ten I'm in the newspaper office and at midnight in bed."

"What an awful day's work! But you must be earning a fortune," commented Manuel.

"Eighty to ninety duros."

"And with that income you live here?"

"You have eyes for only the income, not the expenses. Every month I have to send thirty duros to my family, so that my mother and sister can exist. The litigation costs me fifteen to twenty duros per month, and with the rest I manage to get along."

Manuel contemplated Roberto with profound admiration.

"Why, my boy," exclaimed Roberto, "there's no help for it if a fellow is to live. And that's what you ought to do,—hunt, ask, run around, look high and low. You'll find something."

It seemed to Manuel that even were the promise of kingship held out to him, he would be unable to bestir himself so actively, but he kept silence.

He waited for the sculptor to get up and the two

exchanged impressions as to life's difficulties.

"See here. For the present you work for me as a model," said Alex, "and we'll manage to find some arrangement that will assure us food."

"Very well, sir. As you please."

Alex had credit at the bakery and the grocer's, and calculated that Manuel's board would cost him less than a model would ask for services. The two decided to feed upon bread and preserves.

The sculptor was by no means a lazy fellow but he lacked persistence in his work and was not master of his art; he was never able to bring his figures to completion, and noting, as he attacked the details of the modelling, that the defects stood out more prominently than ever, he would leave them unfinished. Then his pride induced in him the belief that the exact modelling of an arm or a leg was an unworthy, decadent labor; in which his friends, who were afflicted with the same impotency of artistic effort, agreed with him.

Manuel troubled himself little with questions of art, but often it occurred to him that the sculptor's theories, rather than sincere convictions, were screens behind which to conceal his deficiency.

Alejo would make a portrait or a bust, and they would say to him: "It doesn't look like the subject." Whereupon he would reply: "That's a distinctly minor matter." And in everything he did it was the same.

Manuel grew to like these afternoon reunions in the studio, and he listened attentively to all that Alex's friends had to say.

Two or three were sculptors, others painters and writers. Not one of them was known. They spent their time scurrying from one theatre to another, and from café to café, meeting anywhere at all for the pleasure of berating their friends. Outside of this especial theme in which all blended into a perfect harmony, they discussed other matters with peaceful digressions. There was a continuous debating and planning, affirming today, denying tomorrow; poor Manuel, who possessed no basis for judgment, was thrown off the track completely. He could not make out whether they were speaking in jest or in earnest; every moment he heard them shift opinions and it shocked him to see how the selfsame fellow could defend such contradictory ideas.

At times a veiled allusion, a criticism concerning this one or that, would exasperate the entire conclave in so violent a manner that every word quivered with overtones of rage, and beneath the simplest phrases could be detected the pulse of hatred, envy, and mortifying, aggressive malice.

In addition to these young men, almost all of them with venomously sharp tongues, there used to come to the studio two persons who remained tranquil and indifferent amidst the furor of the discussions. One was already somewhat old, serious, thin; his name was Don Servando Arzubiaga. The other, of the same age as Alex, was called Santín. Don Servando, although a man of letters, was devoid of literary vanity, or, if he possessed any, kept it so deep down, so subterraneous, that none could discern it.

He came to the studio for relaxation; with cigarette between his lips he would listen to the varying opinions, smiling at the exaggerations and joining the conversation with some conciliatory word.

Bernardo Santín, the younger of the indifferent members, did not open his mouth; it was exceedingly difficult for him to understand how men could battle like that over a purely literary or artistic question.

Santín was meagre; his face was evenly formed, his nose thin, his eyes sad, his mustaches blond and his smile insipid. This man spent his life copying paintings in the Museo and making them progressively worse; but ever since he had begun to frequent Alex's studio he had lost completely the little fondness he had for work.

One of his manias was to talk familiarly to everybody. The third or fourth time he met a person he was already addressing him with the intimate pronoun.

Of course, these gatherings in Alex's studio were not enough for the bohemians, so that at night they would come together again in the Café de Lisboa. Manuel, without being considered one of them, was tolerated at their meetings, although he was given neither voice nor vote.

And just because he said nothing he paid all the more attention to what he heard.

They were almost all of evil instincts and malicious intent. They felt the necessity of speaking ill one of the other, of insulting one another, of damaging one another's interests through schemes and treachery, yet at the same time they needed to see

one another and exchange talk. They possessed, like woman, the need of complicating life with petty trifles, of living and developing in an atmosphere of gossip and intrigue.

Roberto mingled in their midst, calm and indifferent; he paid no attention to their plans or to their debates.

Manuel seemed to feel that it vexed Roberto to see him so deeply taken up with the bohemian life, and in order to enter into his friend's good graces, one morning he accompanied Roberto as far as the house where he gave his English lesson. On the way he told him that he had made a number of unsuccessful efforts to find work, and asked what course to pursue further.

"What? I've already told you more than once what you have to do," answered Roberto. "Look, look and keep on looking. Then work your very head off."

"But suppose I can't find a place."

"There's always a job if you really mean business. But you have to mean it. The first thing you've got to learn is to wish with all your might. You may answer that all you want is to vegetate in any old way; but you won't succeed even in that if you keep hanging around with the loafers who come to this studio. You'll sink from a mere idler to a shameless tramp."

"But how about them? . . ."

"I don't know whether or not they've ever done anything wrong; as you will readily understand, that doesn't concern me one way or the other. But when

a man can't get a real grasp upon anything, when he lacks will power, heart, lofty sentiments, all ideas of justice and equity, then he's capable of anything. If these fellows had any exceptional talent, they might be of some use and make a career for themselves. But they haven't. On the other hand, they've lost the moral notions of the bourgeois, the pillars that sustain the life of the ordinary man. They live as men who possess the ailments and the vices of genius, but neither the genius's talent nor soul; they vegetate in an atmosphere of petty intrigues, of base trivialities. They are incapable of carrying anything to completion. There may be a touch of genius in those monsters of Alex's, in Santillana's poetry; I don't say there isn't. But that's not enough. A man must carry out what he's thought up, what he's felt, and that takes hard, constant, daily toil. It's just like an infant at birth, and although that comparison is hackneyed, it is exact; the mother bears it in pain, then feeds it from her own breast and tends it until it grows up sound and strong. These fellows want to create a beautiful work of art at a single stroke and all they do is talk and talk."

Roberto paused for breath, and continued more gently.

"And at that, they have the advantage of being in touch with things; they know one another, they know the newspaper men, and believe me, my friend, the press today is a brutal power. But no, you can't get into the newspaper game; you'd require seven or eight years of preparation, hunting up friends

and recommendations. And in the meantime, what would you earn a living at?"

"But I don't want to be one of them. I realize well enough that I'm a common workingman."

"Workingman! Indeed! I only wish you were. Today you're nothing more than a loafer who has yet to become a workingman: a fellow like me, like all the rest of us who toil for a living. At present, activity is a genuine effort for you; do something; repeat what you do until activity becomes a habit. Convert your static life into a dynamic one. Don't you understand? I want to impress upon you the need of will power."

Manuel stared at Roberto dispiritedly; they each spoke a different language.

## CHAPTER II

Señorita Esther Volovitch—A Wedding—Manuel, Photographer's Apprentice

DESPITE Roberto's advice, Manuel continued as he was, neither looking for work nor occupying himself with anything useful; posing for Alex and acting as servant to all the others who forgathered in the studio.

At times, when he remembered Roberto's advice, he would wax indignant against him.

"I know well enough," he would say to himself, "that I haven't his push, and that I'm not able to accomplish the things he can do. But his advice is all nonsense,—at least, as far as I'm concerned. 'Have will-power,' he says to me. But suppose I haven't any? 'Make it.' It's as if I were told to add a palm to my height. Wouldn't it be better for me to hunt for a job?"

Manuel began to feel a hatred against Roberto. He would avoid meeting him alone; it filled him with rage that, instead of giving him something, anything at all, Roberto would settle the matter with a bit of metaphysical advice impossible of translation into reality.

The bohemians continued their disordered existence, their everlasting projects, until a gap was

opened in their midst. Santín was missing. One day he did not show up at the café, the next he did not appear at the studio, and in a few weeks he was nowhere to be seen.

"Where can that fool be?" they asked one another.

Nobody knew.

One night Varela, one of the writers, announced that he had caught sight of Bernardo Santín sauntering along Recoletos in company of a blonde girl who looked like an Englishwoman.

"The confounded idiot!" exclaimed one of the group.

"That's old stuff," replied another. "Schopenhauer said long ago that it's fools who are most successful with women."

"I wonder where he got this Englishwoman."

"That *ingle* woman![1] He must have got her out of his groin!" suggested a callow youth, who was learning how to write farces.

"Ugh! These cheap jokes are enough to drive a man to drink!" cried several in chorus.

The talk drifted to other topics. Three days after this conversation Santín appeared at the café. He was welcomed with a noisy demonstration, spoons drumming against saucers. When the ovation had ended, they besieged him with the question:

"Who is that Englishwoman?"

"What Englishwoman?"

"That blond girl you've been out sporting with!"

[1] Ingle = groin.

"That's my sweetheart; but she's not English. She's Polish. A girl whose acquaintance I made at the Museo. She gives lessons in French and English."

"And what's her name?"

"Esther."

"A fine article for winter nights," blurted the fellow who was learning how to write *sainetes*.

"How do you make that out?" queried Bernardo.

"Easy. 'Cause an *estera* [1] adds to the comfort of a room."

"Oh! Oh! Out with him! Throw him out!" rose a general shout.

"Thanks! Many thanks, my dear public," replied the joker, unabashed.

Santín told how he had come to know the Polish girl. They were all more or less filled with envy of Bernardo's success, and they set about poisoning his triumph, insinuating that this Polish miss might be an adventuress, that perhaps she was in her fifties, and might have had two or three kids by some carbineer. . . . Bernardo, who saw through their malice, never returned to the café.

Very early one morning, a couple of weeks after this scene, Manuel was still asleep on the sofa of the studio, and Roberto, according to his habit, was at work upon the translation of the ten pages that constituted his daily stint, when the door of the studio was flung open and in swept Bernardo. Manuel awoke at the sound of his steps, but pretended to be fast asleep.

[1] Estera = mat.

"What can this fellow have come for?" he asked himself.

Bernardo greeted Roberto and began crossing the studio from one side to the other.

"You've come rather early. Anything the matter?" asked Hasting.

"My boy," muttered Santín, coming to a sudden stop, "I've got serious news for you."

"What's up?"

"I'm getting married."

"*You* getting married!"

"Yes."

"To whom?"

"To whom do you suppose? A woman, of course."

"I should imagine so. But have you gone mad?"

"Why?"

"How are you going to support your wife?"

"Why . . . I earn something at my painting!"

"What can you earn! A mere pittance."

"That's what you think. . . . Besides, my sweetheart gives lessons."

"And you intend to live off her. . . . Now I understand."

"No, no, sir. I haven't any intention of making her work for me. I'm going to open a photographer's studio."

"Photographer's studio! You! Why, you don't know the first thing about it!"

"Nothing. I know nothing, according to you. Well, there are stupider asses than me in the picture

business. I don't imagine it takes a genius to be a photographer."

"No, but it requires a knowledge of photography, and you haven't the least idea."

"You'll see; you'll see whether I have or not."

"Besides, it takes money."

"I have the money."

"Who gave it to you?"

"A certain party."

"Lucky boy!"

"You'll see."

"I'll wager you wheedled the money out of your sweetheart."

"No."

"Bah! None of your lying."

"I tell you, no."

"And I say, yes. Who else would give you the money? Any other person would first have investigated just how much you knew about photography and learned whether you ever worked in a studio; they would require proof of your ability. Only a woman could believe blindly, simply taking a fellow's word for it."

"It's a woman who's lending me the money, but it isn't my sweetheart."

"Come. None of your lies, now. I can't believe that you've come here just to tell me a string of whoppers."

Roberto, who had interrupted his writing, now resumed it.

Bernardo made no reply and began to pace up and down the room anew.

"Have you much work left?" he asked suddenly, coming to a stop.

"Two pages. If you've got anything to say to me, I'm listening."

"Well, see here, it's this way. The money really does come from my sweetheart. She offered it to me. 'What can we do with this?' she said to me. And it occurred to me to open up a photographer's studio. I've hired a place on a fourth floor, with a very attractive workroom, in the Calle de Luchana, and I have to put the suite and the gallery in order. . . . And, to tell the truth, I don't know just how to arrange the gallery, for there are curtains to be put up. . . . But I don't know how."

"That's rather rare in a photographer,—not to know how to arrange a gallery."

"I know how to work the camera."

"Indeed. You know exactly as much as everybody else: aim, press the bulb, and as for the rest . . . let somebody else attend to it."

"No, I know the rest, too."

"Do you know how to develop a plate?"

"Yes, I imagine I could."

"How?"

"How? . . . Why, I'd look it up in a manual."

"What a photographer! You're deceiving your sweetheart most shamefully."

"She wanted it. I may know nothing now, but I'll learn. What I'd like you to do is write a couple of lines to these German firms that I've noted down

here, asking for catalogues of cameras and other photographic apparatus. And then I'd like you to step in to my house, for, with all your talent, you can give me an idea of things."

"You flatter me most indecently."

"No, it's the plain truth. You understand these matters. You'll come, won't you?"

"Very well. I'll come some day."

"Yes, do. Take my word for it, I really want to settle down to business and work, so that my poor father may be able to live a peaceful old age."

"That's the way to talk."

"And there's another thing. This youngster that you keep here,—does he work for you?"

"Why?"

"Because I could take him into my house and he might learn the profession there."

"Now that strikes me as pretty sensible, too. Take him along."

"Will Alex be willing?"

"If the boy is."

"Will you speak to him?"

"Certainly. This very moment."

"And can I count on your writing those letters?"

"Yes."

"Fine. I'll be off now, for I have to buy some glass panes. Speak to the boy."

"Leave that to me."

"Thanks for everything. And you'll drop in to my house, won't you? Remember, my future and my father's depend on it."

"I'll come."

Bernardo pressed the hands of his friend effusively and left. Roberto, when he had finished writing, called: "Manuel."

"What?"

"You were awake, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You heard our conversation?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, if you're willing, you know what you can do. You have a chance to learn a profession."

"I'll go, if you think it best."

"It's up to you."

"Then I'll go this very moment."

Without bidding good-bye to Alex, Manuel left the garret and went off to the Calle de Luchana in search of Bernardo Santín. The apartment was nominally on the third floor, but counting the mezzanine and the ground floor, it was really on the fifth. In response to Manuel's knocking an aged man with reddish eyes opened the door; it was Bernardo's father. Manuel explained the purpose of his coming, and the old man shrugged his shoulders, and returned to the kitchen, where he was cooking. Manuel waited for Bernardo to arrive. The house was still without any furniture; there was only a table and a few pots and pans in the kitchen, and two beds in a large room. Bernardo arrived, and the three had lunch and Santín decided that Manuel should ask the janitor for a step-ladder and get busy arranging and inserting the panes of glass in the gallery.

After having given these orders he said that he

must be off at once to an appointment, and left.

Manuel spent the first day at the top of a ladder, putting the panes into place with bands of lead and gluing the broken ones together with strips of paper.

Arranging the panes was a matter of much time; then Manuel put up the curtains and papered the gallery with rolls of blue printing paper.

Within a week or thereabouts Roberto appeared with the catalogues. He marked with a pencil the things that they would have to order, and instructed Bernardo in the arrangement of the dark room; he indicated a spot best adapted to the installment of a transom, where the plates would be exposed to the sun and the positives made, and informed him upon a number of other details. Bernardo paid close attention to all Roberto said and then handed over all the duties to Manuel. Bernardo, besides possessing little intelligence, was an inveterate idler. He did absolutely nothing. Only when his sweetheart came to see how matters were progressing would he pretend to be very busy.

His sweetheart was a very winsome creature; she seemed to Manuel even pretty, despite her red hair and her lashes and eyebrows of the same colour. She had a pale little face, somewhat freckled, a pinkish, turned-up nose, clear eyes and lips so red and alluring that they roused a desire to kiss them. She was of diminutive build, but very well formed. She did not trill her r's, gliding over them, and pronounced her c's before e and i as *s* instead of *th*.

She seemed to be genuinely in love with Bernardo, and this shocked Manuel.

"She can't really know him," he thought.

Bernardo, with an unlimited conviction of his own knowledge, explained to the girl all the work he was doing and how he was going to arrange the laboratory. Whatever he had heard from Roberto he spouted forth to his sweetheart with the most unheard-of impudence. The girl found everything sailing along very nicely; doubtless she foresaw a rosy future.

Manuel, who saw through the swindle that Bernardo was perpetrating, wondered whether it would not be an act of charity to inform the blonde miss that her sweetheart was a good-for-nothing mountebank. But, after all, what business was it of his?

Bernardo now led a grand existence; he loitered, he bought jewelry on the instalment plan, he gambled at the Frontón Central. All he did in the house was issue contradictory orders and get matters into a hopeless tangle. In the meantime his father cooked away in the kitchen, indifferent to everything, and spent the day pounding in the mortar or mincing meat in the chopping bowl.

Manuel would go to bed so exhausted that he fell asleep at once; but one night, when he had not sunk into slumber so soon he heard Bernardo, from the next room, declare:

"I'm going to kill you."

"Is he going to kill him?" asked the voice of the red-eyed old man.

"Take your time," replied the son. "You made me lose my place."

And he began his reading over again, for that was all it was, until he came once more to the sentence, "I'm going to kill you." On the following nights Bernardo continued his reading, in terrible tones. This, without a doubt, was his sole occupation.

Bernardo was no more worried about things than was his father; all the rest was utterly indifferent in his eyes; he had wheedled the money out of his sweetheart and was now living on it, squandering it as if it were his own. When the camera and other apparatus arrived from Germany, at first he entertained himself by printing positives from plates that Roberto had developed. Soon, however, he wearied of this and did nothing at all.

He was stupid and base beyond belief; he committed one absurdity after the other. He would open the camera while the plates were being exposed, and confuse the various bottles of fluid. It exasperated Roberto to see how utterly careless the man could be.

In the meantime preparations were proceeding for the wedding. Several times Manuel and Bernardo went to the Rastro and bought photographs of actresses made in Paris by Reutlinger, unglued the picture from the mounting and pasted it upon other mountings that bore the signature *Bernardo Santín, Photographer,* printed along the margin in gilt letters.

The wedding took place in November, at the

Chamberí church. Roberto did not care to attend, but Bernardo himself went to fetch him and there was nothing to do but take part in the celebration. After the ceremony they went for a spread to a café on the Glorieta de Bildao.

The guests were: two friends of the groom's father, one of them a retired soldier; the landlady of the house in which the bride had been living, and her daughter; a cousin of Bernardo's, his wife, and Manuel.

Roberto engaged in conversation with the bride, who struck him as being very personable and agreeable; she spoke English quite well, and they exchanged a few words in that tongue.

"Too bad she's marrying such a dolt," thought Roberto.

At the banquet one of the old men began to tell a number of smutty tales that brought blushes to the bride's cheek. Bernardo, who had drunk too freely, jested with his cousin's wife with that coarseness and gracelessness which characterized him.

The return from the ceremony to the house in the evening, was gloomy. Bernardo was in high feather and tried to play the elegant gentleman. Esther spoke to Roberto about her departed mother, and the solitude in which she dwelt.

On reaching the entrance to the house, the guests took leave of the couple. As Roberto was about to go, Bernardo came up to him and, in a lifeless, scarcely audible voice, confessed that he was afraid to remain alone with his wife.

"Man, don't be an idiot. What did you get married for, then?"

"I didn't know what I was doing. Come, stay with me a moment."

"What! A pleasant joke on your wife that would be!"

"Yes, she's fond of you."

Roberto scrutinized his friend, avoiding his eyes, because he had no relish for jests.

"Yes, do stay with me. There's something else, too."

"Well, what is it?"

"I don't know a thing yet about photography, and I'd like you to come for a week or two. I beg it as a special favour."

"It's impossible. I have my lessons to give."

"Come, if only during the lunch hour. You'll eat with us."

"Very well."

"And now, come up for a moment, do."

"No, not now." Roberto turned and left.

During the succeeding days Roberto visited the newly married couple, and chatted with them during the meal.

On the third day, between Bernardo and Manuel, they managed to photograph two servant girls who appeared at the studio. Roberto developed the plates, which, as luck would have it, came out well, and he continued visiting his friend's home.

Bernardo resumed the life of his bachelor days, devoting himself to loafing and amusement. After a few days he failed to show up for lunch. He was

absolutely without a glimmer of moral sentiment; he had noticed that his wife and Roberto had a liking for one another, and he imagined that Roberto, in order to be near the place and make love to his wife, would do the work in his stead. Provided that his father and he lived well, the rest did not matter to him.

When Roberto realized the scheme, he grew indignant.

"See here, listen to me," he said. "Do you imagine I'm going to work here for you while you go idling around? Not a bit of it, my dear fellow!"

"I'm no good for working with these nasty chemicals," replied Bernardo, sullenly. "I'm an artist."

"What you are is a good-for-nothing imbecile."

"Excellent. All the better."

"You're utterly worthless. You married this girl just to get the little money she had. It's disgusting."

"I know well enough you'll take my wife's part."

"I'm not taking her part. The poor thing was idiotic enough herself to have married the like of you."

"Do you mean, then, that you don't care to come here and do the work?"

"I certainly do not."

"Well, it's all the same to me. I've found a business partner. So you may as well know. I don't beg anybody to come to my house."

"All right. Good-bye."

Roberto stopped coming. In a few days the partner presented himself and Bernardo discharged Manuel.

## CHAPTER III

The "Europea" and the "Benefactora"—A Strange Employment

MANUEL returned to Alex's studio. That worthy, displeased with the boy because he had left the place without so much as saying good-bye, refused to allow him to stay there again.

The bohemians who forgathered at the studio asked how Bernardo was getting along, and uttered a string of humorous commentaries upon the lot that Fate held in store for the photographer.

"So Roberto developed his plates?" asked one.

"Yes."

"He retouched his plates and his wife," added another.

"What a shameless wretch that Bernardo is!"

"Not at all. He's a philosopher of Candide's school. Be a cuckold and cultivate your garden. There lies true happiness."

"And what are you going to do now?" asked Alex sarcastically of Manuel.

"I don't know. I'll look for employment."

"See here, do you fellows know a man by the name of Señor Don Bonifacio Mingote, who lives on the third floor of this house?" asked Don

Servando Arzubiaga, the thin, indifferent gentleman.

"No."

"He's an employment agent. He can't have very good jobs on his list, or he'd have got himself one. I know him through the newspaper; he was formerly the representative for certain mineral waters and used to bring advertisements. He was telling me the other day that he needed a young fellow."

"Better go see him," advised Alex.

"You don't aspire to be a grandee of Spain, do you?" asked Don Servando of Manuel, with a smile blended of irony and kindliness.

"No, nor you, either," retorted Manuel, ill-humouredly.

Don Servando burst into laughter.

"If you're willing, we'll see this Mingote. Shall we go this very moment?"

"Come along, if you wish."

They went down to the third floor, knocked at a door, and were bidden into a narrow dining-room. They asked for the agent and a slovenly servant-girl pointed to a door. Don Servando rapped with his knuckles, and in response to a "Come in!" from some one inside, they both entered the room.

A corpulent man with thick, dyed moustaches, wrapped in a woman's cloak, was pacing up and down, declaiming and gesticulating with a cane in his right hand. He stopped, and opening wide his arms, in theatrical tones exclaimed: "Ah, my dear Señor Don Servando! Welcome, welcome!" Then he gazed at the ceiling, and in the same affected manner, added: "What brings to this poor

habitation at such an early hour the illustrious writer, the inveterate night-owl?"

Don Servando related to the corpulent gentleman, who was none other than Don Bonifacio Mingote himself, the reasons for his visit.

In the meantime an ugly creature, filthy and sickly, with arms like a doll's and the head of a Chinaman, stuck his pen behind his ear and began to rub his palms with an air of satisfaction.

The room was ill-smelling, cluttered with torn posters, large and small, which were pasted to the wall; in a corner stood a narrow bed, in disarray; there were three disembowelled chairs with the horse-hair stuffing exposed; in the middle, a brazier protected by a wire-netting, on which two dirty socks were drying.

"For the present I can promise nothing," said the employment agent to Don Servando, after hearing his story. "Tomorrow I can tell better; but I have something good under way."

"You understand what this gentleman is saying," said Don Servando to Manuel. "Come here tomorrow."

"Can you write?" Señor Mingote asked the boy.

"Yes, sir."

"With correct spelling?"

"There may be some words that I don't know. . . ."

"Oh, it's the same with me. We really great men despise those truly petty matters. Sit down here and get to work." He placed a chair at the other side of the table where the yellow man was

writing. "This work," he added, "will serve as payment for the favour I'm going to do you,—finding you a first-class situation."

"Señor Mingote," exclaimed Don Servando, "my infinite thanks for everything."

"Señor Don Servando! Always at your service!" replied the business and employment agent, refocussing one of his cross eyes and making a solemn bow.

Manuel sat down before the table, took the pen, dipped it into the ink-well and waited for further orders.

"Write one of these names on each circular," instructed Mingote, handing him a list of names and a package of circulars. The agent's handwriting was bad, defective,—that of a man who scarcely knows how to write. The circular was headed as follows:

LA EUROPEA

BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT AGENCY
BONIFACIO MINGOTE, Director

In it were offered to the various social classes all manner of articles, opportunities and positions.

One might purchase at bottom prices medicinal remedies, meats, oilskins, fruits, shell fish, funeral wreaths, false teeth, ladies' hats; sputum and urine were analyzed; the agency hunted up guaranteed governesses; it procured notes from the courses in Law, Medicine and special professions; it offered capital, loans, mortgages; it arranged for sensational, monstrous advertisements. And all these

services, plus a multitude of others, were supplied at a minimum fee so tiny as to appear ridiculous.

Manuel set to work copying the names in his best hand on to the circulars and the envelopes.

Señor Mingote inspected Manuel's handwriting, and after congratulating him, wrapped himself up in his cloak, took two or three strides about the room and asked his secretary:

"Where were we?"

"We were saying," replied the amanuensis with sinister gravity, "that the Estrellado Fernández brand of Anis is salvation."

"Ah, yes; I remember."

And all at once Señor Mingote began to shout, in a thunderous voice:

"What is Estrellado Fernández Anis? It is salvation, it is life, it is energy, it is power."

Manuel raised his eyes in astonishment, and beheld the agent's distracted gaze fixed upon the ceiling; he was gesticulating wildly, as if threatening some one with his right hand which was armed with the cane, while his secretary scribbled rapidly over the sheet.

"It is a fact, universally recognized by Science," continued Mingote in his melodramatic tones, "that neurasthenia, asthenia, impotency, hysteria and many other disorders of the nervous system . . . What other ailments does it cure?" Mingote paused to ask, in his natural voice."

"Rickets, scrofula, chorea. . . ."

". . . That rickets, scrofula, chorea and many other disorders of the nervous system . . ."

"Pardon," interrupted the amanuensis. "I believe that rickets is not a disorder of the nervous system."

"Very well. Scratch it out. Let's see; we were at the nervous system, weren't we?"

"Yes, sir."

". . . And other disorders of the nervous system come solely and exclusively from atony,—exhaustion of the nerve-cells. Well, then,—" and Mingote increased the volume of his voice with a new fervour,—"Estrellado Fernández Anis corrects this atony; Estrellado Fernández Anis, exciting the secretion of the gastric juices, routs these ailments which age and destroy mankind."

After this paragraph, delivered with the greatest enthusiasm and oratorical fire, Mingote brushed his trousers with his cane and muttered, in his natural voice.

"You mark my word. That Señor Fernández won't pay. And if only the anisette were good! Haven't they sent some more bottles from the pharmacy?"

"Yes, yesterday they sent two."

"And where are they?"

"I took them home."

"Eh?"

"Yes. They promised them to me. And since you made off with the whole first consignment, I took the liberty of carrying these home with me."

"Lord in heaven! Excellent! First rate! . . . Have folks send you some bottles of magnificent anisette so that some other fellow with long fingers

may come along and . . . Good God above!" And Mingote paused to stare at the ceiling with one of his cross eyes.

"Haven't you any left?" asked his secretary.

"Yes, but they'll run out at any moment."

Then he began another eloquent paragraph, pacing up and down the room, brandishing his cane, and frequently interrupting his discourse to utter some violent apostrophe or humorous reflection.

At noon the amanuensis arose, clapped his hat down upon his head, and went off without a word or a salute.

Mingote placed his hand upon Manuel's shoulder and said to him, in fatherly fashion:

"Well, you can go home now to eat, and be back at about two."

Manuel climbed up to the studio; neither Roberto nor Alejo was there; nor was a crumb to be found in the entire establishment. He rummaged through all the corners, returning by half-past one, to Don Bonifacio's where, between one yawn and another, he continued to address the circulars.

Mingote was highly pleased with Manuel's proficiency, and either because of this, or because at his meal he had devoted himself excessively to Estrellado Fernández' Anis, he surrendered himself to the most incoherent and picturesque verbosity, his gaze as ever fixed upon the ceiling. Manuel laughed loud guffaws at Don Bonifacio's comical, extravagant witticisms.

"You're not like my secretary," said the agent to him, flattered by the boy's manifestations of

pleasure. "He doesn't crack a smile at my jokes, but then he steals them from me and repeats them, all garbled, in those cheap little funereal pieces he writes. And that's not the worst. Read this." And Mingote handed Manuel a printed announcement.

This, too, was a circular in Don Bonifacio's style. It read:

LA BENEFACTORA

MEDICO-PHARMACEUTICAL AGENCY
DON PELAYO HUESCA, Director

No one makes good his promises so well as he. The Administrative Council of La Benefactora is composed of the wealthiest bankers of Madrid. La Benefactora runs an account with the Bank of Spain. There is no admission fee to La Benefactora.

It proffers services as lawyer, relator, procurator, physician, apothecary; it provides aid for births, dietary regimen, burials, lactation, and so forth.

Monthly fee: one, two, two-and-a-half, three, four and five pesetas.

(Actions speak louder than words)

General Director: PELAYO HUESCA, Misericordia, 6.

"Eh?" cried Mingote when Manuel had finished reading. "What do you think of that? Here he is making his living in La Europa, and then he goes and plagiarizes me and runs La Benefactora. That man is the same way in everything. As treacherous as the waves. But ah, Señor Don Pelayo, I'll get even with you yet. If you're a

perfidious bat, I'll nail you to my door; if you're a miserable tortoise, I'll smash your shell for you. Do you see, my son? What can you expect of a country where they don't respect intellectual property, which is not only the most sacred, but the only legitimate form of all property?"

Mingote did not point out to Manuel a note that was printed on the margin of his circular. This was one of Don Pelayo's ideas. In it the Agency offered itself for certain intimate investigations and services. This note, very tactfully drawn up, was addressed to those who wished to form the acquaintance of an agreeable woman so as to complete their education; to those who were eager to consummate a good match; to those who harboured doubts as to their other half; and to others, to whom the Agency offered probing and confidential investigations, at a low price, and vigilance by day and by night, accomplishing all these assignments with the utmost delicacy.

Mingote did not like to confess that this idea had escaped him.

"Do you understand? It's impossible to live," he concluded. "Folks are nothing but beasts. I see, however, that you make distinctions, and I'll take you under my wing."

And, indeed, through Mingote's protection, Manuel was able to eat that night.

"Tomorrow, when you arrive," instructed Bonifacio, "you'll take a package of these circulars and go around distributing them from house to house, without missing a single one. I don't want you to

slip them in under the doors, either. At every house you are to knock and ask. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"In the meantime, I'll be looking after your position."

On the following day Manuel distributed a package of circulars and returned at meal time with his task accomplished.

He was getting tired of waiting when Mingote appeared in his room; he stopped in front of Manuel, swept his cane rapidly through the air, struck the boy's arms, stood still, recoiled, and shouted:

"Ah! Rogue! Bandit! Mountebank!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Manuel in fright.

"The trouble? You knave! The trouble? Wretch, you! You're the luckiest fellow on two feet; your future is assured; you've landed a job."

"As what?"

"As a son."

"As a son? I don't understand."

Mingote planted himself squarely, gazed at the ceiling, saluted with his cane as a fencing-master would with his foil, and added:

"You're going to pass for the son of nothing less than a baroness!"

"Who? I?"

"Yes. You've no cause for complaint, you rogue! You rise out of the gutter to the heights of aristocracy. You may even manage to acquire a title."

"But is all this true?"

"As true as I'm the most talented man in all Europe. So get a move on, my future Baron;

spruce up, scratch off your dirt, brush your hair, scrape the mud off those filthy sandals of yours, and accompany me to the home of the baroness."

Manuel was dumfounded; he could not understand what it was all about. But he knew that the agent would not have taken the trouble to run all over town simply for the pleasure of perpetrating a joke upon him.

At once he made ready to accompany Mingote. Together they entered the Calle Ancha de San Bernardo, strode down Los Reyes to the Calle Princesa, and continued along this street until they paused before a wide entrance, into which they disappeared.

They passed into a corridor that led to a wide patio.

A series of galleries with symmetrical rows of chocolate-hued doors surrounded the patio.

Mingote knocked at one of the doors of the gallery on the second floor.

"Who is it?" asked a woman's voice from within.

"It's me," replied Mingote.

"I'm coming. I'm coming."

The door was opened and there appeared a mulattress in battered shoes, followed by three poodle dogs, who barked furiously.

"Hush, Léon! Hush Morito!" cried the servant in a very languid tone. "Come in. Come in."

Manuel and Mingote walked into a stifling room, which had a window that looked upon the patio. The walls of the room, from a certain height, were

almost covered with women's clothes that formed a sort of wainscoting all around it. From the shutter-bolt of the window was suspended a low cut sleeveless chemise with lace edging and bows of faded blue, which displayed cynically a dark blood-stain.

"Wait a moment. The lady is dressing," requested the mulattress.

Within a short while she reappeared and asked them to step into the study.

The baroness, a blonde woman attired in a bright gown, was reclining upon a sofa in an attitude of intense languor and desolation.

"Here again, Mingote?"

"Yes, madame. Again."

"Have a seat, gentlemen."

The place was a cramped, ill-lighted room crowded with far more furniture than it could easily accommodate. Within a short space were heaped together an old console with a mantle-clock upon it; several crumpled armchairs, upon which the silk, once upon a time red, had turned violet through the action of the sun; two large oil portraits, and a bevelled mirror with a cracked surface.

"I bring to you, dear Baroness," said Mingote, "the youngster of whom we have spoken."

"Is this the one?"

"Yes."

"It seems to me I know this boy."

"Yes. And I know you, too," spoke up Manuel. "I was in a boarding-house on the Calle de Mesonero Romanos; the landlady's name was Doña Casiana;

my mother was the maid-of-all-work there."

"Indeed. That's so. And your mother,—how is she getting along?" asked the baroness of Manuel.

"She's dead."

"He's an orphan," interjected Mingote. "As free as the forest bird,—free to sing and to die of hunger. It was in just such circumstances that I myself arrived in Madrid some time back, and queerly, strangely enough, strangely indeed, I'd like to go back to those good old days."

"And how old are you?" asked the baroness of the boy, unheedful of the agent's reflections.

"Eighteen."

"But see here, Mingote," exclaimed the baroness, "this youngster is not the age you said he was."

"That doesn't matter at all. Nobody would say that he was a day over fourteen or fifteen. Hunger does not permit the products of nature to grow. If you cease watering a tree, or cease feeding a human being . . ."

"Tell me,"—and the baroness interrupted Mingote impatiently as she lowered her voice, "have you told him what he's wanted for?"

"Yes; he would have guessed it at once, anyway. You can't fool a kid like this, who's knocked about the town, as if he were a respectable child. Poverty is a great teacher, Baroness."

"And you tell that to me?" replied the lady. "When I think of the life I've led and am leading now, my hair stands on end. Without a doubt the good Lord endowed me with a privileged nature, for I accustom myself quite easily to everything."

"You can always lead an easy life if you wish," answered Mingote. "Oh! If I had only been born a woman! What a career I'd have led!"

"Let's not talk of that."

"You're right. What's the use? Now we'll plan our new stratagem. I'll get to work preparing the proofs of the boy's civil status. And do you wish to take charge of him?"

"Very well."

"He can run your errands for you. He's a pretty good hand at writing."

"Never mind. Let him remain here."

"Then, my dear Baroness, good-bye until one of these days when I'll bring you the documents. Dear lady . . . at your feet."

"Ay, how ceremonious! Good-bye, Mingote! See him out, Manuel."

The two men walked to the door together. There the agent placed his hands upon the youth's shoulders.

"Good-bye, my lad," he said. "And don't forget, if ever you should become a baron in real earnest, that you owe it all to me."

"I'll not forget. You needn't worry on that score," answered Manuel.

"You'll always remember your protector?"

"Always."

"My son, preserve that filial piety. For a protector such as I is almost like a father. He is . . . I was about to say, the arm of Providence. I feel deeply moved . . . I am no longer young. Have you, by any chance, a few coins in your pocket?"

"No."

"That's too bad," and Mingote, after a sweep with his cane, left the house.

Manuel closed the door and returned to the room on tip-toe.

"Chucha! Chucha!" called the baroness. And when the mulattress appeared who had opened the door to Mingote and Manuel, the baroness said to her:

"See. This is the boy."

*"Jesu! Jesu!"* shrieked the servant. "He's a ragamuffin! Whatever put it into madame's head to bring such a tramp into the house?"

Before such an outburst as this, although it was spoken in the most mellifluous and languid of tones, Manuel stood paralyzed.

"You've terrified the lad," exclaimed the baroness, bursting into loud laughter.

"But Your Grace must be mad," muttered the servant.

"Hush! Hush! Not so much noise. Get some soap and water ready for him and have him wash up."

The mulattress left, and the baroness scrutinized Manuel closely.

"So the man told you what you've come here for?"

"Yes, he told me something."

"And are you willing?"

"Yes, I am, Señora."

"Good. You're a philosopher. I'm quite satisfied. And what have you done up to now?"

Manuel recounted his adventures, drawing a little upon his imagination, and entertained the baroness for a while.

"Fine. Don't say a word to anybody, understand? . . . And now go and wash yourself."

## CHAPTER IV

The Baroness de Aynant, Her Dogs and Her Mulattress Companion—Wherein is Prepared a Farce

LITTLE work, little to eat and clean clothes: these were the conditions that Manuel found in the home of the baroness, and they were unsurpassable.

In the morning his duty was to take the baroness's dogs out for a stroll; in the afternoon he had to run a few errands. At times, during the first days, he felt homesick for his wandering existence. Several issues of huge novels published in serial form, which Chucha lent him, allayed his passion for tramping about the streets and transported him, in company of Fernández y González and Tárrago y Mateos, to the life of the XVIIth century, with its braggart knights and its lovelorn ladies.

Niña Chucha, an eternal chatterbox, recounted to Manuel, in several instalments, the tale of her dear friend, as she called the baroness.

The Baroness de Aynant, Paquita Figueroa, was a queer woman. Her father, a wealthy Cuban gentleman, sent her at the age of eighteen, accompanied by an aunt, on a trip to Europe. On the steamer a young Flemish gentleman, fair and blond, as elegant as a Van Dyck portrait, had paid her much atten-

tion; the girl had responded with all the ardent enthusiasm of the tropics, and within a month after their arrival in Spain, the Cuban miss was named the Baroness de Aynant, and left with her husband to take up their residence in Antwerp.

The honeymoon waned, and both the Flemish gentleman and the Cuban wife, once they had settled down again to a tranquil existence, agreed that they were not a congenial, well-matched couple. He was devoted to the simple, methodical life, to the music of Beethoven and to meals prepared with cows' butter; she, on the other hand, was fond of a wild time, of gadding about the fashionable promenades; she loved a dry, hot climate, the music of Chueca, light meals and dishes made with oil.

These divergencies of taste in small matters, piling up, thickening, in time clouded completely the love of the baron and his wife. She could not let pass calmly the cold, tranquilly ironic remarks that her husband made concerning the sweet-potatoes, the oil and the accent of the southern peoples. The baron, in turn, was piqued to hear his wife speak scornfully of the greasy women who devote themselves to cramming down butter. The rivalry between oil and butter, embroiling itself, interweaving itself with their other affairs of greater importance, assumed such proportions that the couple reached the point of excitement and hatred leading to a separation. The baron remained in Antwerp dedicating himself to his artistic predilections and to his buttered toast, while the baroness came to Ma-

drid, where she could give free rein to her fondness for fruit and oily food.

In Madrid the baroness committed a thousand follies. She tried to procure a divorce, that she might marry a ruined aristocrat. But when her bill of divorcement was all prepared for filing, she learned that her husband was seriously ill, and no sooner did she get the news than she left Madrid, hurried to Antwerp, nursed the baron, saved his life, fell in love all over again and presented him with a baby girl.

During this second epoch of their love the couple threw a dense veil over the great question that had formerly divided them. The baroness and the baron made mutual concessions, and the baroness was well on the way to becoming an excellent Flemish dame when she was left a widow.

She returned to Madrid with her daughter, and soon her Levantine instincts reawakened. Her brother-in-law, uncle and guardian of the child, helped her out with a monthly stipend, but this was not enough. A friend of her father's,—a certain Don Sergio Redondo, a very wealthy merchant,—offered her his hand; but the baroness did not accept, and preferred his patronage to being his wife. Soon she deceived him with another, and for twelve years she continued this duplicity.

In the midst of this squandering, this madness and surrender to caprice, the baroness preserved a moral background, and withdrew her daughter completely from the world in which the mother dwelt. She placed her child in a convent school and every

month, the first money that she laid hands upon was used to pay for the girl's tuition. When she had completed her education, the baroness intended to take her off to Antwerp and live there with her, resigning herself to the career of a respectable woman.

Niña Chucha would grumble and protest at her good friend's whims, but she always ended by obeying them.

Manuel found the house a paradise; he had nothing to do and would spend his idle hours smoking, if there were anything to smoke, or walking along the Moncloa, accompanied by the baroness's three dogs.

In the meantime Mingote was hard at work. His plan was to exploit Don Sergio Redondo, friend of the baroness's father and former protector of the lady. The latter, with the instincts of an intriguing, deceitful wench, had informed her former protector that their relations had produced a boy; then she had told him that the boy had died, and afterward, that the boy was still alive.

All these affirmations and denials the lady accompanied with a request for money, to which Don Sergio acceded; until the victim, rendered suspicious, notified the baroness that he did not believe in the existence of that son. The baroness upbraided him as a miserable wretch and Don Sergio answered, pretending not to understand, and keeping a tight lock on his money-chest.

How had Mingote discovered these facts? Undoubtedly it had not been the baroness who told

him, but he ferreted them out none the less. And as his imagination was fertile, it occurred to him to propose to the baroness that she hunt up some boy, provide him with false documents and pass him off as Don Sergio's son.

The baroness, who knew nothing whatever about the law and considered the Penal Code a net spread to catch vagabonds, seized upon the suggestion as a most excellent and fruitful plan. Mingote demanded a share in the profits and the baroness promised him all he should desire. From that moment Mingote set about searching for a youngster who would fulfill the conditions necessary to the deception of Don Sergio, and when he came upon Manuel, he brought him at once to the home of the baroness.

After he had been there a week, Manuel was already provided with the papers that identified him as Sergio Figueroa. Between Mingote, Don Pelayo the amanuensis, and a friend of theirs called Peñalar, they forged them with most exquisite skill.

"And now what shall we do?" asked the baroness.

Mingote stood wrapped in thought. If the baroness were to write to Don Sergio, that old fellow, in all probability, since he was now suspicious, might take the whole matter sceptically. They must, therefore, discover some indirect procedure,—they must let him get the news from a third party.

"Suppose it were to be from a confessor? What do you think of that?" asked Mingote.

"A confessor?"

"Yes. A priest who would present himself in

Don Sergio's home and inform him that, under the seal of confession, you had told him . . ."

"No, no," interrupted the baroness. "And where is this priest?"

"Peñalar will go, in disguise."

"No. Besides, Don Sergio knows that I'm not very religious."

"Then perhaps a schoolmaster would be better."

"But do you imagine that he's going to believe I confess to a schoolmaster?"

"No. We'll have to alter the plan. The master will go to see Don Sergio and tell him that he has a boy in his school, a young prodigy, who is sadly neglected by his mother. One day he asks the prodigy: 'What's your father's and mother's name, my boy?' And the boy replies: 'I haven't any father or mother; my step-mother is the Baroness de Aynant.' Then he, the teacher, comes to see you and you tell him that you're badly off and that you can't pay the child's tuition fee, and that his father, a wealthy gentleman, does not even care to know him. The evangelical master asks you several times for the name of this inhuman parent; you refuse to divulge it; but at last he wrests from your lips the name of that cruel creature. The sublime pedagogue then says: 'I cannot permit the abandonment of this child, of this extraordinary child,' and he determines to go to see the father of the child. . . . Well, what do you think of that?"

"Not a badly woven plot. But who's going to play the schoolmaster? You?"

"No, Peñalar. He was simply made for the

part. He was a tutor in a college; you'll see. This very day I'll hunt him up and bring him here. In the meantime, you prepare Manuel. Let him look somewhat like a schoolboy. While I'm out looking for Peñalar, it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to teach him a little,—the first questions and answers of the catechism, for example."

In accordance with Mingote's instructions, the baroness ordered Manuel to comb his hair and spruce up; then she fished out for him a sailor suit with a large white collar. Yet however much they might adorn him and ply their arts upon his person, it was impossible to make him look like a respectable youngster; his indifferent, roguish eyes and his smile, which was half bitter and half sarcastic, betrayed the ragamuffin.

At two o'clock Mingote was back at the baroness's home, with a dark man of clerical aspect. The man, named Peñalar, spoke with great emphasis; then, when Mingote stated his proposition, Peñalar, abandoning his emphatic tone, discussed the conditions of payment and the percentage due him.

He hesitated about accepting the commission, in order to see whether he could get more favourable terms, but, finding Mingote unyielding, he accepted.

"Let the boy come along with me this very minute."

Peñalar brushed the sleeves of his black frock coat, combed his hair back, and taking Manuel by the hand, said to him in a truly evangelical voice:

"Come, my child."

Don Sergio Redondo had a flour shop on the Plaza del Progreso.

They reached the square and walked into the shop.

"Don Sergio Redondo?" asked Peñalar of an old man in a flat, woolen cap.

"He hasn't come down to the office yet."

"I'll wait. Tell him that there's a gentleman here who would like to see him."

"Very well. And who shall I say is waiting for him?"

"No, he doesn't know me. Just tell him that it's a family matter. Sit down, my boy," added Peñalar, turning to Manuel, with a voice and a smile of purely evangelical unction.

Manuel took a seat, and Peñalar let his gaze wander about the shop with the calmness and ease of one who is fully confident and aware of just what he is about.

The old man in the woolen cap soon reappeared.

"Step into the office," and he pushed back a black screen set with striped panes. "The master will be in presently."

Peñalar and Manuel entered a room lighted by a grated window, and sat down upon a green sofa. Opposite them rose a mahogany closet lined with business books; in the middle stood a writing desk with many drawers, and to one side of this, a safe with gilt knobs.

The room exhaled the spirit of an implacable merchant. One readily saw that this cage held an ugly bird. Manuel was terrified. Peñalar himself,

perhaps, experienced a moment of weakness, but he swelled up with importance, twirled his moustaches, carefully adjusted his spectacles upon his nose and smiled.

Don Sergio did not keep them waiting long. He was a tall old fellow, with white moustaches, and a suspicious glance which he shot obliquely over the rim of his glasses. He wore a long frock coat, bright-coloured trousers, a skull cap of green velvet with a long tassel that hung down one side. He strode in without a greeting, and eyed the man and the boy with evident displeasure. They arose. Perhaps he even thought that he had divined the reason of the visit, for in a dry, authoritarian voice, and without bidding them be seated, he asked Peñalar:

"What do you wish, sir? Was it you who had something to say to me with reference to a family matter? You?"

Any other person would have been seized with a desire to strangle the old man. Not Peñalar, however; difficult situations were his forte, and most to his taste. He began to speak, unabashed by the inquisitorial glances of the merchant.

Manuel listened to him with a mingling of admiration and terror. He could see that the old man was growing angrier every second. Peñalar spoke on unperturbed.

He was a poor captive soul, a sentimentalist, an idealist—ah!—devoted to the instruction of youth, —that youth in whose bosom repose the seeds of

the nation's regeneration. He had suffered a great deal,—a great deal. He had been in the hospital. A man such as he, who knew French, English, German, who played the piano,—a man of his stamp, related to the entire aristocracy of the kingdom of León, a man who knew more theology and theodocy than all the priests rolled into one.

Ah! He did not say all this out of vainglory; but he had a right to life. Gómez Sánchez, the illustrious histologist, had once said to him:

"You ought not to work."

"But I'm hungry."

"Then beg."

Wherefore sometimes he did beg.

Don Sergio, utterly astounded before this avalanche of words, made no attempt to interrupt Peñalar. The latter paused, smiled unctuously, noted that the force of habit had carried him on to his everlasting theme of the reason for his sponging on folks, and realizing that his eloquence was leading him astray, lowered his voice, continuing in a confidential tone:

"This our life is, despite all its drawbacks, so attractive,—is it not so, Don Sergio?—that one cannot leave it with indifference. And yet I believe that death is liberation. Yes, I believe in the immortality of the soul, in the absolute dominion of spirit over matter. Not so in previous years. No, I must confess," and he smiled more benignly than ever, "I was formerly a pantheist, and I still preserve, from that period, perhaps, an enthusiasm for

nature. Ah, the country! The country is my delight! Many a time I recall those verses of the Mantuan:

> Te, dulcis conjux, te solo in litore secum
> te veniente die, te decedente canebat.

"Are you fond of the country, Don Sergio? You really should be, with all the gifts you possess."

Don Sergio's anger, which had been rising together with Peñalar's incoherent verbosity, exploded into one curt sentence:

"I abominate the country."

Peñalar stopped short with mouth agape.

"Sir, my dear sir," added the merchant, raising his furious voice, "if you have plenty of time to waste, I haven't."

"I haven't yet told you the reason for my visit," said Peñalar, removing his glasses and preparing to wipe them with his handkerchief.

"No, and it isn't necessary. I can imagine it very well. I give no charity."

"My worthy Señor Don Sergio," and Peñalar arose, spectacles in hand, turning his short-sighted glances about the room, "you have made a grievous mistake. I have not come to ask alms nor is that a habit of mine. No one may contradict that statement. I have come," and he placed his glasses resolutely in their position, "to fulfil a sacred duty."

"Let's be done with this. What sacred duty are you talking about? To the point! Enough of the farce. I hate charlatanry."

"Allow me to have a seat. I am weary," murmured Peñalar in a frail voice. "Is any one within hearing?"

Don Sergio glared at him like a hyena. Peñalar passed his riddled handkerchief across his broad forehead; then, turning to Manuel, who was still regarding the scene in complete amazement, he said to him:

"Please, my dear child, leave us alone for a moment and wait for me outside."

Manuel opened the office door and walked out into the shop. This manœuvre caused Don Sergio to start back in bewilderment.

"I, my worthy sir," said Peñalar, as soon as he found himself alone with the merchant, "am dedicated to the education of youth."

"You're a schoolmaster? So I've already heard."

"I was acting as examiner in the Colegio del Espíritu Santo, when it occurred to me to go into business on my own account."

"And you lost money. Very well. But how does all this concern me?" shrilled Don Sergio, pounding upon the table with a book.

"I crave your pardon. Among my pupils I have this boy who has just left us. He is a prodigy, a youngster of extraordinary talents. When I saw how bright he was, how determined, I conceived an interest in him; I inquired about his family, and was told that he had neither father nor mother, and had been taken into a certain lady's home."

"Well, what has all this got to do with me?"

"Patience, Don Sergio. I went to see this kind

lady, who is a baroness, and I said to her, 'The boy whom you have taken into your home is worthy of the utmost encouragement. Something should be done for his education.'

" 'His mother has no means and his father, who is very wealthy, does nothing for him,' was the baroness's reply.

" 'Tell me who his father is, and I'll go to see him,' I said.

" 'It's no use,' she answered, 'for you'll get nothing out of him. His name is Don Sergio Redondo.' "

As he pronounced these words, Peñalar got up, and with his head thrown back contemplated Don Sergio, even as the exterminating angel glances upon a poor reprobate. Don Sergio turned frightfully pale, pulled out his handkerchief, rubbed his lips, hawked. It was easily to be seen that he was perturbed.

Peñalar scrutinized the old man keenly, and noting that his arrogance was abating, became more evangelical and moral than ever.

"The baroness," he added, "said to me,—and you must pardon my undeviating sincerity—she said to me that you were an egotist and a heartless creature. But despite this," and he smiled sweetly, feeling himself by now quite supermoral and superevangelic, "I thought: My duty is to go to see that gentleman. That is why I have come. Now you will do as your conscience dictates. I have followed the dictates of mine."

After this little speech Peñalar had nothing more to add, and with the smile of the entire martyrology

upon his lips he took his hat, saluted most ceremoniously and drew near to the door.

"And that youngster is the boy who was here?" asked Don Sergio in a low, hesitant voice.

"That is he."

"And where does this woman live,—this baroness?" exclaimed the merchant.

"I cannot tell you. I shall ask her first. If she authorizes me to tell, I will return with the answer."

And Peñalar left the office.

"Come along, my boy," he said to Manuel.

And with proud, noble demeanour, head erect, he left the place, leading his beloved pupil by the hand,—that portentous child so little appreciated by his parents.

## CHAPTER V

The Life and Miracles of Señor de Mingote—Wherein Beginneth the Succulent Exploitation of Don Sergio

ACCORDING to the best historians of Madrid the acquaintance of the Baroness de Aynant with Bonifacio de Mingote dated back some two years.

During one of the numerous periods in which the baroness had found herself financially embarrassed she had resorted to a usurer on the Calle del Pez. Instead of the money-lender there appeared his clerk, Mingote himself, who arranged the matter between the two of them. Ever since that time Mingote was a regular visitor at the baroness's. Who was Don Bonifacio? What was Don Bonifacio?

There are bimanous creatures who rouse a most extraordinary curiosity. In the natural history of man they resemble those species of monotremes situated between the birds and the mammals,—the wonder of zoölogists. It is to this class of interesting bimanal animals that Mingote belonged.

This Mingote was about fifty, short, stout, with dyed moustaches, fleshy face, red, tiny nose, cynical mouth and the general appearance of a police agent or a busybody broker. He dressed ostentatiously,

and delighted in wearing a thick chain in his waistcoat and false diamonds, as big as chick-peas, on his shirt-front and his fingers.

Mingote had exercised every office that a person may engage in outside the boundaries of decency: he had been a usurer, a member of the police, leader of a claque, exchange broker, rural home agent, court officer, procurer. . . .

Manuel had the opportunity of knowing him inside out. He was a past master in all the arts of deception,—an ingrate, impudent, cowardly with the brave and brave with cowards, as petulant and vain as few, fond of attributing to himself the bravery and merit that belonged to another, and of distributing among others the defects that were exclusively his own.

Manuel noticed that the baroness was always in the habit of speaking ill of Mingote, whenever that worthy was absent, and yet, when she listened to his chatter, she did so with evident pleasure. Doubtless she admired his subtlety and the rogue's finesse in his evil arts.

After he had been speaking for some time his shameless conversation would become repellent.

Mingote's chief preoccupation was to conceal his cynical nature, but his cynicism, through its very powers of expansion, oozed from his very soul, glittered in his eyes, flickered on his lips and flowed in his every word.

"Folks who insult me only waste their time," he would declare, calmly. "When it comes to shamelessness, I can't be beat."

And he was right. There were times in which he would realize the bad effect produced by some rascality of his, whereupon he would make special efforts to appear a very Roland or Cid of perfection. But within a very short while from out of the cuirass of this punctilious knight would stick the mountebank's claw.

"In matters of honor I admit of no distinctions," the man would say, in one of his knightly moods. "You may declare to me that honor is a martingale. True enough. But such is my misfortune; I am by temperament a cavalier."

Mingote was a partisan of anarchico-philanthropico-collectivist ideas; some of his letters he ended with the salutation, "Health and Social Revolution," which served as no obstacle against his trying to establish, at various times, a loan shop, a house of assignation and other similarly honest means of subsistence.

This ex-loan shark had collaborated in several ignominious labours with the comrades of dynamite and picric acid, wheedling money out of them, now for the purpose of effecting a coup and purchasing bombs, again for the compiling of a libertarian dictionary, wherein he, Mingote, with his formidable powers of analysis, more formidable than the highest explosives, shattered to fragments all the traditional notions of this stupid society.

Whenever Mingote spoke of his dictionary, his disdain for existence, his fanatical glance, his melancholy attitude of a soul misunderstood all indicated the genius of revolution.

On the other hand, when he recounted his successes as an advertising agent, as a business broker, the modern man would appear,—the struggle-for-lifer of the public auction and the loan shop, of the druggist and the perfumer.

"It was I," he would boast, "who auctioned off La Chavito. I sold the stable to the Marquis de Sacro-Cerro and the lands to the Viscountess. It was I who launched the Pipot Cataphoretic; the Alex Wild Arabian Jasmine Pectoral; Chiper's Manicure Paste; Pirogoff's Electrical Cataplasm; Clarckson's Peptic Flour; Tomás y Gil's Artificial Heart; Rocagut's Sudorific Plaster, and yet, here I stand, utterly deserted."

Mingote imagined that all Madrid was in a conspiracy to keep him down; but he was waiting for the opportune moment in which he should triumph over his enemies.

His greatest illusions were founded upon his mines, which, though they were supposedly wonderful, he was not averse to selling in cheap lots. He was for ever carrying around in his pockets, wrapped up in newspaper sheets, various specimens from his mines in this place and that.

"This," and Mingote would exhibit a bit of ore, "comes from the Suspiro del Moro Mine. What a specimen! Eh? Admirable. Isn't it? Iron . . . almost pure. Ninety nine and one half per cent. mineralized. This other is of calamine. Sixty eight per cent. There are half a million tons."

When his hoax had been discovered, not only was he unperturbed, but he would burst into laughter.

The baroness greeted Mingote's projects with loud guffaws.

"But if you haven't any mines, how are you going to sell them?" she would ask.

"Ah, that doesn't matter. I invent them. It's the same thing. As soon as we have put this thing through with Don Sergio we'll go into business. We'll lay out a mine; deposit, three or four hundred pesetas, whatever it amounts to. Then we'll carry minerals from somewhere else to the land, and at once we issue shares: The Prosperity Company, Limited. Capital, 7,000,000 pesetas. We rent a building, put up an imposing copper sign with gilt lettering over the door and a servant in blue livery. We'll collect on the shares, and the deal is worked."

Did Mingote believe in his fancies? He himself could not have said for certain. The man was a stranger even to himself. There, within his soul, he harboured the notion of an adverse fate which prevented his prospering because he was an unblushing knave. As for skill, he had enough and to spare; nobody was as wily as he in receiving a creditor and sending him off unpaid; he was an expert in adulation and mendacity; yet, despite his constant lying, he was as gullible as any one else when it came to the deceptions of other rogues.

He believed in secret societies, in Free Masonry, in the H . . . and all such mummery.

Amidst danger and perilous situations, despite the extraordinary cowardice of the ex-loan shark, his cleverness never abandoned him. Cracking a joke was a necessity to him, and in all probability, were

he impaled, with the hangman's rope around his neck, or on the very steps of the scaffold, all atremble with terror, he would have had to make some droll remark between the chattering of his teeth and the tremors of horror.

He would quarrel with folk about the most futile matters; in the street cars and at the theatres he would get into altercations with the conductors and ushers; he would raise his stick to the street-urchins, and treat everybody with the utmost disdain. He would make indecorous proposals to women in the very presence of their husbands or their parents, and despite all this, he very rarely received the cuffs or the cudgellings that any one else in his place would have earned.

Vainglorious and petulant, he himself would laugh at his petulance. He would transform his smile into a menacing gesture, and his menacing gesture into a smile; at times he felt a certain rare, comical sort of modesty and would blush, but never did he lose his self-composure.

The ex-loan shark, though he was by no means of an agreeable type, was very successful with the women. He devoted himself to old age. His tactics were rapid and expedite; after the first week he was already borrowing money.

He counted his mistresses in pairs, each with two or three little Mingotes. In complicity with them the ex-moneylender had organized a marvellous system of mendicity carried on through means of letters, and as the income from his agency kept dwindling, these mistresses, the great Mingote and the

little Mingotes, managed to live upon the profits of the women. Whenever people inquired as to these women, Mingote replied that they constituted his household servants.

This was Mingote, the marvellous, rare Mingote, aider and abettor of the Baroness of Aynant.

The very day on which Manuel and the sublime pedagogue recounted the details of their visit to Don Sergio, the baroness and Mingote inaugurated their campaign. The baroness rented a parlour for a few days from a boardinghouse keeper on the first floor.

"But what are you doing this for?" asked Mingote. "The worse the old man finds you situated, the more splendid it will be for our purpose."

"I gave you credit for more cleverness than that, Mingote," replied the baroness coldly. "If Don Sergio were to find me in a filthy hole like this, he'd throw me an alms. But otherwise,—we'll see. For the rest, kindly let me conduct my own affairs."

Mingote, confounded, kept silent. Undoubtedly in such a matter as this, he had something to learn.

The baroness arranged her rented room in good taste, sent one of her gowns out to be sewed and ironed, and dressed Manuel, even using rice powder, to the great desperation of the child. When all was in readiness, Mingote wrote to Don Sergio,—*il vecchio Cromwell,* as he called the old man,—a post card signed by Peñalar, giving him the directions to the house.

The baroness and Manuel awaited the arrival of

*il vecchio*. About midafternoon they heard the rumble of a carriage that drew up before their door.

"There he is," said the baroness. She peered through the slats of the shutters. "Yes, it's he," she added, lying down upon the sofa and picking up a book.

When she was well dressed and decked out she appeared appetizing; a blonde, buxom, good-looking wench.

"See here. It would be better for you to go into that other room," said the baroness to Manuel, pointing to a bedchamber. "I'll tell him that you're studying."

Manuel, who was by no means delighted with the rôle that had been assigned to him, disappeared into the alcove. Between this and the parlour was a curtained glass door. Manuel found this observation post quite comfortable, and began to spy through the shades. He was interested to see how the baroness would manage, how she would weave the strands of that deception, in which the least oversight might enmesh her.

When the maidservant of the boardinghouse entered to announce Don Sergio, the baroness was already completely submerged in her part. *Il vecchio* came in solemnly, and saluted her; the baroness made a gesture of astonishment at sight of him, and then, with a languorous, haughty wave of the hand she indicated that he might be seated.

"The old *Cromwell,*" took a seat; Manuel could observe him calmly. He was pale,—of a chalky complexion.

"An ugly old papa I've picked up," said Manuel to himself.

The baroness and Don Sergio began to talk in whispers. It was impossible to hear what they were saying. The chalky-complexioned old fellow gazed about the room, estimated the furniture, and was doubtless surprised to find so elegant a parlour.

Then he continued to speak heatedly; the baroness listened to him languidly, smiling with a certain amiable, kindly irony. It seemed to Manuel that all the old man needed was a pair of little horns and goat's feet to represent, together with the baroness, a group he had seen a few days previously in a show-window on the Carrera de San Jerónimo. The title was "The Nymph and the Satyr." Manuel thought that the old man was about to get down on his knees, and he felt like shouting, "Get out, *Cromwell!*"

The old gentleman continued to speak in his insinuating manner, when all at once he grew excited and began to gesticulate violently. "This abandonment of the boy is unspeakable!" he exclaimed.

"Unspeakable!"

"Yes, señora."

"But you,—what right have you to speak?"

"Every right in the world. Yes, señora."

The baroness seemed to be amazed at these words, and replied with vague excuses; then she became indignant and rising most gracefully from the sofa threw the book onto the floor, and accused the irate *Cromwell* of every ill that might befall the boy.

He was to blame for everything, because he was a miserly old wretch.

The terrible *vecchio* replied to this arraignment in a brusk tone, averring that to lewd, extravagant women all men were stingy.

"If you have come here," interrupted the baroness, "to insult a woman because she is alone and unprotected, I'll not have it."

Then came the chalky old man's explanations, his efforts to clear himself of blame, his offers. . . .

"I need you for nothing," retorted the baroness haughtily. "I did not send for you."

The *vecchio* coaxingly vowed and vowed again that he had come there only to offer her whatever she might need, and to beg her to let him stand the expenses of the boy's education. He desired also to see the youngster a moment.

The baroness allowed herself to be won over; but she warned the chalky old fellow that the boy thought his parents had died.

"No, no. Don't worry, Paquita," exclaimed *il vecchio.*

The baroness rang the bell and asked the servant, in most nonchalant fashion:

"Is Sergio at home?"

"Yes, señora."

"Ask him to come in."

Manuel entered, in confusion.

"This gentleman wishes to see you," said the lady.

"I've been told—I've been told that you are a very good student," mumbled *il vecchio.*

Manuel raised his two eyes in the greatest astonishment. Don Sergio pinched the boy's none too rosy cheeks. Manuel stood there gazing at the floor, and after the baroness had given him permission, walked out of the room.

"He's very shy," explained the baroness.

"I was the same way myself when I was his age," replied Don Sergio.

The lady smiled maliciously. Manuel went back to his place in the bed chamber and continued to spy upon them; the baroness bewailed her lack of means; *Cromwell* defended himself like a lion. At the conclusion of the conference the chalky old fellow drew out his wallet and deposited several banknotes upon the night table.

The baroness saw him to the door.

"So, Paquita, you are quite satisfied now?" he asked, before leaving.

"Ever so much!"

"And you're not sorry that I came to see you?"

"Ay, Don Sergio! You deserted me so cruelly. And you—the only friend of my poor father!"

"Yes, it's true, Paquita, it's true," murmured *il vecchio,* taking one of the baroness's plump hands and fondling it.

And he descended the stairs, pausing every moment to bid the lady adieu.

"Good Lord, what an old bore!" she grumbled, slamming the door. "Manuel, Manolito, you did splendidly! You're a hero! Did you see? *Il vecchio Cromwell,* as Mingote calls him, has left a thousand pesetas. This very next day we move."

Very early on the following morning the baroness and Manuel went out in search of new rooms. After endless running about, their heads almost out of joint from so much gazing upward, they found a third floor apartment in the Plaza de Oriente, with which the baroness was simply enchanted. It cost twenty-five duros per month.

"It'll seem dear to Niña Chucha, but I'll take it," said the baroness.

So she called at the first floor, where the house agent lived, talked to him and made an advance payment.

They moved in that very day, and Manuel laboured away with enthusiasm, carrying furniture from one place to the other, and setting the pieces down in the new quarters as Niña Chucha directed him.

As the furnishings of the house were rather meagre, and the baroness had some things stored away in the home of a Cuban woman, a friend of hers, she went several days later to see the lady and ask for the furniture. She did not show up during that whole day, nor did she appear for supper, but returned very late at night. Niña Chucha and Manuel waited up for her. She came home with eyes that shone more brightly than usual.

"The Colonel's wife wouldn't let me go," she mumbled. "I dined with her, then I went with her daughters to the *Apolo* and they saw me to the door."

Manuel could not understand how this could be so unusual for the baroness, and was quite astonished

to hear her reply to Niña Chucha's recriminations, stammering and laughing at the top of her voice in a most incoherent manner. Manuel would have sworn that, as she left the dining-room, the baroness stumbled, but he was so sleepy that he was not certain, and he refrained from comment.

On the following day, just before lunch, Niña Chucha was in the street when there was a knock at the door. Manuel opened. It was the chalky old man.

"Hello, student," he saluted. "And where is Doña Paquita,"

"In her room," was Manuel's reply.

Don Sergio rapped at the door with his knuckles and repeated several times:

"May I come in?"

"Come in, Don Sergio," invited the baroness, "and open the windows."

The old man entered the room, tripped against the packages scattered over the floor, and opened the balcony shutters.

"But, dear Paquita? Still abed?" he asked, greatly astonished. "That's not good for your health."

"Oh, if you could only see how hard I've been working," replied the baroness, stretching herself. "Yesterday I went to bed completely exhausted, and at five this morning I was already at work. But all this dragging of household effects has given me a terrible headache, and has forced me to lie down again."

"Why do you work so hard? You don't have to."

"There are things to be done; then again, in this house there is no one to lend a hand. All Chucha does is read novels. And as for Sergio, I'm not going to have him travel around like a porter. So that everything falls on my shoulders. I hope I'll be feeling much better some other day, and then you'll have the pleasure of seeing what a good girlie I am, and how I follow your instructions to the letter."

"Excellent, Paquita, excellent. Just keep on being a good little girlie."

The baroness, to prove how genuine was her girlishness, bestowed a few caresses upon *Cromwell* and then, in an indifferent tone, asked him for fifty pesetas.

"But. . . ."

"Indeed I know that you're going to scold me. Don't you imagine that I've spent all the money, or anything like it. The truth is, I have a five-hundred peseta note that I don't want to break, and as there's a little account I've got to settle. . . ."

"Very well, here you are." And Don Sergio, with a smile that was meant to be amiable, extracted his pocket book from his pocket and left a blue bill upon the night table; whereupon he was seized with the notion that it was not very gallant to leave only what had been asked for, so he deposited another note.

The baroness placed the candlestick upon the

two notes and then, huddling into the bedclothes, she murmured in a drowsy voice:

"Ay, Don Sergio, my headache's coming back!"

"Take good care of yourself, then, my dear. Take good care and don't work so hard."

After closing the balcony shutters, Don Sergio left the bedroom and met Niña Chucha, who had just come in from the street.

"You shouldn't allow your mistress to work so hard," he said to her dryly. "She's getting ill."

The mulattress gazed smilingly at the old man.

"Very good, sir," she said.

"And the boy,—what's he doing?"

"He's studying," answered Niña Chucha sarcastically, pointing to Manuel, who sat resting his elbows upon the dining-room table with his head in his hands.

And indeed he was devouring one of the serial issues of a novel by Tárrago y Mateos.

## CHAPTER VI

Kate, The Pale Lass—Roberto's Love Affairs—Military Punctilio—Wicked Women—Anthropological Disquisitions

A MONTH after they were settled in their new apartment, Christmas came, and, as there were holidays in all the schools, the baroness went to fetch her daughter at the Sacred Heart, returning with her in a carriage.

Niña Chucha undertook to inform Manuel about the baroness's daughter, and give him full details.

"She's a simpleton, understand? A pale, insipid creature, who looks like a doll."

Manuel knew her, but he was not sure whether she would recall him. During the years since he had seen her she had grown into a winsome girl. She did not resemble her mother, though, like her, she was blonde; she must rather take after her father. She was pale, with correct features, clear blue eyes, golden eyebrows and lashes, and fair hair that lacked lustre, yet was quite alluring.

When the schoolgirl arrived, Niña Chucha outdid herself in demonstrations of affection; the newcomer recognized Manuel, and this filled him with a deep satisfaction.

The baroness's daughter was called Catalina, her relations from Antwerp called her Kate, but the

baroness generally referred to her as La Nena,—the baby.

With the arrival of Kate the habits of the household underwent a marked change; the baroness abandoned her nocturnal excursions and put a check upon her loose tongue. At table with a sad smile, she gave ear to the school tales that her daughter related, without the slightest interest in what she heard.

There was no harmony between the two characters. Kate was slow of understanding, but deep; her mother, on the other hand, was gifted with the subtletly and cleverness of the moment. The baroness, at times, grew impatient as Kate spoke on, and would say, with mingled kindliness and boredom:

"Oh, what a simpleton of a baby I have!"

Since Kate's coming, Niña Chucha and Manuel ceased keeping the baroness company in the dining-room. This did not trouble Manuel in the least, but the mulattress was quite put out, and she attributed this arrangement to Kate, whom she considered a pale, proud doll, cold and heartless. Manuel, who had no reason for disliking Kate, found her very simple, very likeable, although lacking vivacity.

During the Christmas holidays mother and daughter often went out together on shopping tours; they were accompanied by Manuel, who returned loaded with bundles.

One day, shortly after the New Year, when the baroness, Kate and Manuel had gone to the *Apolo*

Theatre to see "Captain Grant's Nephews," Manuel caught sight of Roberto Hasting following them at a certain distance. As they left the theatre, Roberto shadowed them; the girl pretended she had noticed nothing.

The next day, it was snowing. Manuel noticed Roberto walking across the Plaza del Oriente, seemingly very much engrossed.

Manuel sought a pretext under which to leave the house and Roberto at once came over to him.

"Are you in her house?" he asked hurriedly.

"Yes."

"You must deliver a letter to her."

"Certainly."

"I'll bring it to you this afternoon. Give it to her and tell me how she receives it. She'll not answer me, I know she'll not answer me. But you'll hand it to her, won't you?"

"Of course. Don't worry."

Surely enough, that very afternoon Roberto walked again through the falling snow, Manuel ran down, took the letter and dashed back into the house.

At that moment Kate was amusing herself with her wardrobe. She had a thousand gew-gaws stored in a number of little boxes; in some, medallions; in others, small prints, chromographs, gifts from her schoolmates or the family. Her prayer books were filled with little pictures and souvenirs.

Manuel, with Roberto's missive in his pocket, drew near to the girl like a criminal. La Nena exhibited all her wealth to him; he swelled with pride. Manuel scarcely dared to touch the medallions, the

jewels, the thousand things that Kate had treasured up.

"My uncle gave me this chain," said the schoolgirl. "This ring comes from my grandfather. This pansy I picked in Hyde Park, when I was at my uncle's in London."

Manuel listened to her without a word, ashamed to have the letter in his pocket. La Nena continued showing new things to him. She still preserved her childhood playthings; in her wardrobe everything was classified with the utmost precision; each article had its place. In some of the books she pressed pansies and other flowers, afterwards copying them and filling in the sketch with water-colours.

Manuel made two or three attempts to bring the conversation round to Roberto, but his courage failed him.

All at once, after much clearing of his throat, he stammered:

"D-do you know . . . ?"

"What?"

"Roberto . . . that fair student who used to board at the other house . . . the fellow who was at the theatre yesterday . . . he gave me a letter for you."

"For me?" And Kate's cheeks flushed pink, while her eyes sparkled with much more than their usual vivaciousness.

"Yes."

"Give it to me."

"Here it is."

Manuel handed over the letter and Kate quickly thrust it into her bosom. She finished arranging her wardrobe and soon afterward locked herself in her room. Two days later Kate sent Manuel off with a note for Roberto, who responded at once with another for Kate.

One day Kate went with Manuel to his school, where they were giving a Nativity play, and she was accompanied both ways by Roberto. They both were very talkative. The student expatiated upon his plans. It struck Manuel that this love business was rather queer. As far as he could see, Roberto did not say a thing worth hearing, and yet Kate listened to him with her soul hanging upon every word.

Roberto, to Kate, was the paragon of respectability. She spoke to him with calm solemnity, making no attempt to appear gay or clever; she was very attentive to all he said.

Manuel became the confidant of Roberto and Kate. The girl was of immaculate candor and innocence, and extraordinarily ignorant in matters of guile. Manuel felt a genuine submissiveness before that aristocratic, elegant nature; he was filled with a feeling of inferiority that in no wise troubled him.

La Nena recounted to Manuel all the things she had seen in Paris, Brussels, Ghent; she told him about the parks of London, much to his amazement. In return, Manuel enlightened Kate as to life in the underworld of Madrid, filling her in turn with the utmost astonishment: the cellars, the taverns, the

tramps; he described to her the urchins who ran away from home and slept in the nooks and crannies of the churches; he spoke to her of the ragamuffins who pilfer in the laundries; he told her what the shelters were like. . . .

Manuel possessed a certain gift for imparting his impressions; he would exaggerate and fill in with figments of his imagination the gaps left by reality. La Nena would listen to him in a rapture of interest.

"Oh, how frightful!" she would say. And the mere thought that this wretched rabble of which Manuel spoke might rub elbows with her made her tremble.

The maiden felt a deep repugnance for the common people; she would not go out on Sundays, so as to avoid mingling with soldiers and men in labourers' smocks. It seemed to her that common folk must be inherently wicked. As soon as the street lamps were lighted she preferred to be indoors.

They used to hold their conversations at nightfall in a room that looked out on to the street, whence could be seen the Plaza de Oriente, like a wood, and the Royal Palace, to whose cornices hundreds of pigeons repaired after winging about all day in flocks. As a background there was the Casa del Campo and the horizon which reddened with the approach of dusk. . . .

After Epiphany, Kate returned to school, whereupon the old habits were re-established in the household and the customary disorder reigned.

The first nocturnal sally that the baroness made

was to her Cuban friend, in the company of Manuel. The baroness and Manuel left after supper. The Cuban lady lived in the Calle Ancha. They knocked; a diminutive lackey in blue livery and gold braid opened the door, and they passed through a corridor into a lavishly lighted drawing-room, decorated in cheap, loud taste. In the centre stood an electric lamp with a cluster of seven or eight globes; there was a huge sofa upholstered in a very flowery stuff; two gilt chairs shone beside a fire-place, upon the marble mantelpiece of which sat a clock in the form of a ball, a barometer fashioned like a hammer, a thermometer that represented a dagger, and sundry other things in the most absurd shapes. Photographs hung on every wall.

Only a few disreputable looking women were present; they humbly rose. The baroness took a seat, and shortly after, the Cuban entered,—a very common, brutal woman, dressed in an exceedingly loud costume, and wearing thick diamonds in her ears and on her fingers. She took the baroness's hand and sat down on a sofa beside her. It could easily be seen that she desired to flatter her visitor. The Colonel's wife was more than a common woman; she was bestial. She had a prominent jaw, tiny black eyes and a mouth that bespoke cruelty. Her features betrayed a certain disturbing, menacing lubricity; one imagined that such a woman must be the prey to strange vices,—that she was capable of crime.

Manuel, from his place in a corner, busied him-

self with the examination of a photograph album that he discovered upon a night table.

The wife of the colonel, whom the baroness had known as a sergeant in Cuba, said that she thought her younger girl, Lulu, would make her début as a dancer in a certain Salon; she was giving her the final lessons.

"Really?" asked the baroness.

"Oh, yes, indeed. Mingote got her the contract and has taken charge of the finishing touches, as he puts it. Ah, what an accomplished fellow! He's in the dining-room now, with some friends. He'll be right in. Mingote brought a poet along who has written a monologue for the dear, clever little girl. It's called "Snap-shots." That's a modernistic name, isn't it?"

"I should say."

"It's supposed to be a girl who goes out into the streets to take photographs and she meets with a young blade who approaches her and suggests that she make him a reproduction or a group, and she replies: 'Hey there, don't you dare touch my chassis!' Now, isn't that clever?"

"Exquisite," declared the baroness, eyeing Manuel and laughing.

The other women,—distinguished kitchen-maids to judge from their appearance,—nodded their heads in token of assent, and smiled sadly.

"Have you many guests in your room?" asked the baroness.

"As yet no one has come. In the meantime, sup-

pose the child dances a little and lets you see what she can do."

The Colonel's wife shouted into the corridor, whereupon Lulu appeared, attired in a skirt covered with spangles, and wearing curly bobbed hair. She was all put out because she had not been able to find a wrist-watch, and was shrilling in her thin, rasping voice.

"Let the people inside know," said the Colonel's wife, "that you'll be here."

The girl left with the message, and within a short while the colonel himself appeared,—a respectable gentleman, with a white beard, who was lame and leaned upon Mingote's arm. Behind these two came a slender young man with fair moustaches and red cheeks; this was, as the baroness gathered, the poet. Then followed a long-haired personage, the piano instructor, on whose arm nestled the elder daughter of the house,—a fair, buxom wench who seemed to have escaped from a painting by Rubens.

"Well, which shall we have first?" asked the Colonel's wife. "The monologue or the dance?"

"The monologue, the monologue," was the general chorus.

"Let's see, then. Silence."

The poet, who, to judge from the glitter in his eyes and the colour of his cheeks, was quite drunk, smiled amiably.

The little girl began to recite very badly, in the voice of a hoarse rooster, a heap of coarse banalities in doggerel that would have brought a blush to the

16321

tanned and weather-beaten cheeks of a coast-guard. And every one of these banalities wound up with the refrain

*Don't you dare touch my chassis!*

At the conclusion the colonel offered the opinion that the verses struck him somewhat . . . somewhat,—oh,—just a wee bit free, and he looked from one face to another for corroboration. The point was heatedly discussed. The head of the house presented his arguments, but Mingote's rebuttal was conclusive.

"No, my dear Colonel," ended the ex-loan shark excitedly. "The fact is that you feel military honour too keenly. You regard this from the standpoint of a soldier."

The baroness stared at Mingote in amazement, and could not contain her laughter.

The colonel explained in confidence to Mingote the reason why the military conception of honour must perforce be more rigid than that of civilians. There was the necessity of discipline, there was order, and the uniform.

After the monologue, the personage with the flowing hair sat down to the piano and the little girl began to dance the tango. In this, too, there was something that required elucidation, and the Colonel's wife was eager to have it settled at the very moment. Of such vital importance was it. There is a genuinely solemn, transcendental part to the tango: that hip-movement which the public

scientifically calls "the hinge." "Now," asked the Colonel's wife, "how is Lulu to perform this part of the tango,—that is, the hinge? Is she to play it to the limit, or cover it up a trifle?"

The baroness did not think that the tango should be so highly accentuated; a little of that movement would not be so bad. The Colonel's wife and Mingote protested, affirming that the public always prefers the "hinge," as it is more exciting.

The colonel, despite his military honour, was of the opinion that the public really did prefer "the hinge," but that a little more or less of wiggling was a minor matter.

Whereupon Mingote, in order to show the little girl how to do that movement, arose and began to wiggle his hips in the most grotesque fashion.

The girl imitated his example smilingly, but without the least enthusiasm. At this juncture the Colonel's wife whispered into the baroness's ear that only a man could teach a woman the grace and charm of that movement. The baroness smiled discreetly.

The diminutive gold-braided lackey entered with the announcement that Señor Fernández had arrived. This Fernández must have been a person of some importance, for the Colonel's wife arose at once and prepared to leave.

"Hurry, start the roulette," said the colonel to his wife. "And have the lights put on in the large room. What do you say?" he went on, turning to the baroness. "Shall we go into the game as partners?"

"We'll see later, my dear Colonel. At first I'll try my luck alone."

"Very well."

Lula danced another tango and after a brief while the Colonel's wife returned.

"You may come in," she said.

The old kitchen-maids got up from their chairs and, crossing the corridor, entered a large room with three balcony windows. There were two tables, one of them with a roulette wheel and the other bare.

The three old women, the baroness, the colonel and his two daughters sat down before the roulette table, where the banker and the two payers were already seated.

*"Faites vos jeux,"* said the croupier with the impassivity of an automaton.

The white sphere danced around the wheel and before it came to a stop the croupier pronounced: *"Rien ne va plus!"*

The two payers placed their rakes upon the cloth to prevent the laying of any further bets. "No more bets," they repeated, at the same time, in a monotonous voice.

Gradually the room was filling with people, and the seats around the table were taken.

Beside the baroness a man of about forty had taken a chair. He was tall, robust, broad-shouldered, with black, kinky hair and white teeth.

"Why, my boy, you here?" exclaimed the baroness.

"And how about you?" he retorted.

He was a second or third cousin of the baroness; his name was Horacio.

"Didn't you tell me that you invariably retired at nine?" asked the baroness.

"It's only an accident that I came here. It's the first time."

"Bah."

"I assure you it is. Shall we go in it together?"

"That is not a bad idea."

They pooled their money and continued playing. Horacio played according to the baroness's directions. They were lucky and won. Gradually the parlor became thronged with a variegated, exotic crowd. There were two well-known members of the aristocracy, a bull-fighter, soldiers. Several women and their daughters were pressed closely around the tables.

Manuel caught sight of Irene, Doña Violante's granddaughter, beside an old gentleman with his hair pasted down. The man was playing heavily. His fingers were fairly concealed by rings set with huge stones.

Seated upon a divan near Manuel, a very pale and emaciated old gentleman with a white beard was conversing with a beardless youth who looked bored.

"Have you withdrawn from the game so soon?" asked the young man.

"Yes. I withdrew because my money ran out. Otherwise I'd have kept on playing until they found me lying dead across the green cloth. To me, this is the only life. I'm like La Valiente. She knows

me, and she says to me now and then: 'Let's go in it together, Marquis?'—'I won't bring you bad luck,' is my answer."

"Who is La Valiente?"

"You'll see her soon, when the baccarat begins."

A light was turned on over the table.

An old man with moustaches like a musketeer's arose with a deck of cards in his hands and leaned against the edge of the table.

"Who deals?" asked the old man.

"Fifty duros," murmured one.

"Sixty."

"A hundred."

"A hundred and fifty duros."

"Two hundred," shrieked a woman's voice.

"That's La Valiente," said the marquis.

Manuel contemplated her with curiosity. She was between thirty and forty; she wore a tailor-made costume and a Frégoli hat. She was very dark, with an olive complexion and beautiful black eyes. She would gamble until she could hardly see, and then go out into the corridors for a smoke. She brimmed over with energy and intelligence. They said she carried a revolver. She had no use for men and fell passionately in love with women. Her most recent conquest had been the colonel's elder daughter, the buxom blonde, whom she dominated. At times she was favored by the most unbelievable luck, and to assuage her pangs of passion, she played and won in most insolent fashion.

"And that fellow who never plays, yet is always

here,—who is he?" asked the young man, pointing to a coarse looking old fellow of about seventy, with dyed moustaches.

"He's a money-lender who, I believe, is the partner of the Colonel's wife. When I was Governor of La Coruña he was waiting trial for some piece of smuggling or other that he had perpetrated at the Customs House. They removed him from office, and then gave him a commission in the Philippines."

"As a reward?"

"My dear man, everybody has to live," replied the marquis. "I don't know what he did in the Philippines, but he was in court several times, and when he was free they gave him a position in Cuba."

"They wanted him to make a study of the Spanish colonial régime," suggested the youth.

"Doubtless. He got into a few scrapes over there, too, until he returned and went into the money-lending business. They say now that he is worth not less than a million pesetas."

"The deuce, he is!"

"He's a serious, modest fellow. Up to a few years ago he lived with a certain Paca, who was the proprietress of a dyer's shop on the Calle de Hortaleza, and on Sundays they'd both go out to the suburbs like a poor couple. This Paca died, and now he lives alone. He's shy and humble; many a time he himself goes out and does the buying, and then cooks his own meal. His old secretary is a really interesting chap. When it comes to forgery he can't be beaten."

Manuel listened most attentively.

"That's what you really can call a man," said the marquis, eyeing the secretary closely.

The man they were watching,—a person with a red, pointed beard and a mocking air, turned around and saluted the speaker affably.

"Hello, there, Master," said the marquis to him.

"You call him Master?" asked the young man.

"That's what everybody calls him."

Lulu, the colonel's daughter, and two girl friends of hers passed by the marquis and his young companion.

"How pretty they are," commented the marquis.

The place took on the mixed appearance of a brothel and a high-class den of vice. There was here neither the anxious silence of the gambling-house nor the confused clamour of a brothel: people gambled and loved with discretion. As the Colonel's wife put it, this was a very modernistic gathering.

On the divans the girls were conversing very animatedly with the men; they were discussing and studying out combinations for the game. . . .

"All this delights me," said the marquis with his pale smile.

The baroness was beginning to feel somewhat nauseated and wished to be going.

"I'm off. Will you come along with me, Horacio?" she asked of her cousin.

"Certainly. I'll accompany you."

The baroness arose, then Horacio; Manuel joined them.

"What a mob of creatures, eh?" said the baroness with that peculiar, ingenuous laugh of hers, once they were in the street.

"That's amorality, as they say nowadays," replied Horacio. "We Spaniards aren't immoral. The fact is that we simply have no notion of morality. When I got up to take a little air, the colonel said to me, 'You see, you see, they've cut down my pay: reduced it from eighty to seventy. So clearly enough I have to find other sources of income. That's why soldiers' daughters have to become dancers . . . and all the rest.' "

"Did he say that to you? What a barbarian!"

"What? Does that shock you? Not me. It's just a natural and necessary consequence of our race. We've degenerated. We are a race of the lowest class."

"Why?"

"Because we are. All you've got to do is look around you. Did you see the head on the colonel's shoulders?"

"No. Has he anything in his head?" asked the baroness jokingly.

"Not a thing. The brains of a Papuan. Morality is found only in superior races. The English say that Wellington is superior to Napoleon because Wellington fought through a sense of duty and Napoleon for glory. The idea of duty never penetrates into craniums like the colonel's. Talk to a Mandingo of duty. Nothing doing. Oh, anthropology is a most instructive science. I explain everything by anthropological laws."

They were passing by the Café de Varela.

"Shall we go in here?" asked her cousin.

"Let's go."

The three sat down around a table, each asked for a favourite drink and the baroness's cousin continued his speech.

The man was a queer type; he spoke an almost incomprehensible Andalusian dialect, with a guttural *h;* he had enough money to subsist upon and with this, and a minor position in a ministry, he managed to get along. He dwelt in a very carefully regulated disorder, reading Spencer in English and changing his mode of life at certain seasons.

Like the whimsical fellow he was, he had been sunk for the past four or five years in the swampy fields of sociology and anthropology. He was convinced that intellectually he was an Anglo-Saxon, who need not be occupied with questions pertaining to Spain or to any other nation of the South.

"Yes, indeed," continued Horacio as he filled his glass with beer, "I explain everything, down to the tiniest detail, by social or biological laws. This morning, as I was getting up, I heard my landlady conversing with the baker about the rise in the cost of bread. 'Why has bread gone up?' she asked him. 'I don't know,' he answered. 'They say that the harvest is good.' 'Well, then?' 'I don't know.' I went off to the office at the precise hour, with English punctuality; there was nobody there; that's the Spanish custom. So I asked myself, How does it happen that bread goes up if there's a good

harvest? And I hit upon the explanation which I think will convince you. You know that there are tiny cells in the brain."

"How should I know anything about that?" retorted the baroness, dipping a biscuit into her chocolate.

"Well, take my word for it, there are cells, and, according to the opinion of the physiologists, each cell has its own particular function; one serves for one thing, another for another. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Now just recall that in Spain there are some thirteen millions of inhabitants who can neither read nor write. Do you follow me?"

"Certainly. Of course."

"Very well. That cell which in educated persons is employed in attempts at understanding and thinking, is here left unemployed by thirteen millions of the population. That energy which they should expend in discussion, they waste in bestial instincts. As a consequence, crime increases, so does sexual appetite, and with the increase of sexual appetite comes an increase in the consumption of food, whereupon bread goes up."

The baroness could not help bursting into laughter at her cousin's explanation.

"That's no mere fancy," replied Horacio, "it's the God's honest truth."

"Indeed I don't doubt it, but the news strikes me funny." Manuel, too, had to laugh.

"Where did you pick up this kid?"

"He's the son of a woman we knew. What does your science tell you of him?"

"Let's see. Remove your cap."

Manuel removed his cap.

"He's a Celt," proclaimed Horacio. "Fine race. Facial angle open; broad forehead; not much jaw. . . ."

"And what does all this signify?" queried Manuel.

"In the final analysis, nothing. Have you any money?"

"I? Not a button."

"Then let me tell you this: since you have no money, and aren't a man of prey, and can't use your intelligence, even though you may have some, which I believe is the case, you'll probably die in a hospital."

"How rude!" exclaimed the baroness. "Don't talk like that to the boy."

Manuel greeted the prognostication with laughter; it seemed very comical to him.

"On the other hand, I," went on Horacio, "have no fear of dying in a hospital. Look at my head; see that jaw; tokens of a most brutal instinct of acquisitiveness. I'm a Berber by race,—a Euro-African. And fortunately, I may add, I have been influenced by the ideas of Lord Bacon's pragmatic philosophy. If it weren't for that, I'd now be dancing tangoes in Cuba or Puerto Rico."

"So that, thanks to this Lord, you're a civilized man?"

"Relatively civilized. I don't pretend to compare myself to an Englishman. Can I be certain

that I'm an Aryan? Am I, perhaps, a Celt or Saxon? I don't deceive myself. I am of an inferior race. What am I going to do about it? I wasn't born in Manchester, but in Camagüey, and I was brought up in Málaga. Just imagine that!"

"And what has that to do with the case?"

"Everything, my dear. Civilization comes with rainfall. It is in the moist, rainy countries that the most civilized types are nurtured, and the most beautiful as well. Types such as your daughter, with those blue eyes of hers, her fair complexion and her blond hair."

"And how about me? What am I?" asked the baroness. "A little of what you said before?"

"A tiny bit Berber, you mean?"

"Yes. I think that was it. A tiny bit Berber, eh?"

"In character, perhaps, but not in type. You're pure Aryan; your ancestors must have come from India, from the meseta of Pamir or the valley of Cabul, but they did not pass through Africa. You may rest easy on that score."

The baroness eyed her cousin with a somewhat enigmatical expression. After a short while the cousins and Manuel left the café.

## CHAPTER VII

The Berber Feels Profoundly Anglo-Saxon—The Mephistophelian Mingote—Cogolludo—Kate's Departure

EVER since the baroness and the sociologist had met at the garrulous gathering of the Colonel's wife, Horacio began to frequent the baroness's house and deliver courses in anthropology and sociology in the dining-room. Manuel had no idea as to what those sciences might be in the original, but as translated into Adalusian by the baroness's cousin, they were certainly picturesque. Manuel and Niña Chucha listened to the Berber with intense interest, and at times offered objections, which he answered, if not with very scientific arguments at least with an abundance of wit.

Cousin Horacio got into the habit of staying for supper and finally remained after supper as well. Niña Chucha favoured the Berber perhaps through racial affinity, and laughed, showing her white teeth, whenever Don Sergio came on a visit.

The situation was compromising because the baroness cared not a whit about anything. After having used Mingote, she sent him away two or three times without so much as a céntimo. The agent began to threaten, and one day he came re-

solved to raise a scandal. He spoke of the forging of Manuel's certificates, and hinted that this would cost the baroness a term in jail. She replied that the responsibility of the forgery rested with Mingote,—that she would find some one to protect her, and that, in case justice should intervene, the one to go to jail would be he.

Mingote threatened, shrieked, shouted at the top of his lungs, and who should come walking in at the height of the dispute but Horacio.

"What's the trouble? You can hear the noise from the street," he said.

"This man is insulting me," cried the baroness.

Horacio seized Mingote by the scruff of the neck and shot him through the doorway. Mingote dissolved into curses, introducing Horacio's mother into the altercation, whereupon the latter, forgetting Lord Bacon, felt the Berber in his blood, raised his foot and planted the toe of his boot upon Mingote's buttocks. The agent shouted even more loudly, whereupon the Berber again caressed with his foot the roundest part of Mingote's person.

The baroness foresaw that the agent would need time to take his revenge; she did not believe that he would dare to mention the forgery of the documents involving Manuel's paternity, for his fingers would be caught in the same door. He would, however, be likely to inform Don Sergio of cousin Horacio's presence in the house. Before he could do this, she wrote the merchant a letter asking for money with which to pay off certain debts. She sent Manuel with the missive.

The chalky old fellow read the letter and grew uneasy.

"See here, tell your . . . mistress she'll have to wait. I, too, have to wait very often."

The baroness was furious at this reply.

"The coarse old brute! The vile beast! It's all my fault for having bothered with the disgusting old duffer. Just wait till he comes. I'll tell him what's what."

But Don Sergio did not show up, and the baroness, who surmised what had taken place, moved to a cheaper house in order to economize. Niña Chucha, Manuel and the three dogs were thus transferred to a third-floor apartment on the Calle del Ave María.

Here the idyll begun between the baroness and Horacio resumed its course, despite the fact that the latter, because of his Anglo-Saxon, phlegmatic temperament, or because of the low esteem in which he held women—a patrimony of the southern races—attached little importance to flirtations of this kind.

From time to time, in order to meet the expenses of the house, the baroness would sell or pawn a piece of furniture; but, with the disorder which reigned in that household, the money did not last long.

When they had been settled for about a month in the Calle del Ave Maria, Don Sergio appeared one morning boiling with indignation. The baroness refused to receive him, and sent the servant

maid to say that she was out. The old man went away and that afternoon wrote the baroness a letter.

Mingote had not "peached." Don Sergio fumed; it did not appear seemly to him that Horacio should spend his days and nights in the baroness's home; he did not mind an occasional visit from her cousin, but his assiduity,—that was the rub. The baroness showed the letter to her cousin; he, who doubtless was just hunting for some pretext under which he might escape, bethought himself of Lord Bacon, suddenly felt the Anglo-Saxon in him rise,—the Aryan, man of morals,—and ceased his visits to the home of the baroness.

The baroness, who was suffering from the final flush of romanticism that comes with the Indian summer of youth, sank into despair, addressed epistles to the gallant, but he continued to feel Anglo-Saxon and Aryan, ever mindful of Lord Bacon.

In the meantime Don Sergio, finding that his letter had produced no results, returned to his mission and came again to the house.

"My dear Paquita, what can possibly be the trouble with you?" he asked, gazing upon her altered features.

"I believe I've caught the grippe, my head feels so heavy. I have aches all over my body. Here you see me, utterly abandoned. It is God's will, I suppose."

Don Sergio listened silently to the whirlwind of

words and wails with which the baroness tried to clear herself of blame; then he said:

"This sort of life can't go on. You must introduce some method, some semblance of order. Things simply can't go on like this."

"That's just what I've been thinking," answered the baroness. "I understand well enough that this sort of life isn't for me. I'll go back to another house at twelve duros."

"And the furniture?"

"I'll sell it."

How was she to tell him that she had already sold it?

"No, I . . ." The chalky fellow was about to speak like a crafty merchant, but he did not dare. "Then again," he went on, "these frequent visits of your cousin aren't at all nice."

"But what can I do if he pursues me," murmured the baroness in a plaintive voice. "That man is simply mad over me. I know that such a passion is rare. A woman of my years. . . ."

"Don't talk like that, Paquita."

"Well, then, there you are. He follows me like a shadow. But you'll see, now; I'll see that he never comes here any more.

"Never come! He certainly will come, until you tell him not to, in so many words. . . ."

"That's just what I've told him, and that's why he'll never come any more."

"All the better, then."

The baroness glared at Don Sergio in indignation, and then assumed an air of deep contrition.

Don Sergio brought forward his plans for regeneration, and was of the opinion that Paquita ought to get rid of Niña Chucha, whom the chalky old gentleman detested most cordially. But the baroness protested that she loved the girl as her own child—almost as much as, if not more than, the dogs, which were the very apple of her eyes.

The baroness suddenly sat up on the sofa.

"I have a plan," she said to Don Sergio. "Tell me what you think of it. In yesterday's *Imparcial* I saw advertised a country house in Cogolludo, with a garden and orchard, at fifty duros per annum. I imagine that it must be a pretty bad place; but, at least it's a bit of land and a place to live, and even a tiny cabin is enough for me. I could be fitting up the cabin gradually. What do you think of the suggestion, Don Sergio?"

"But why should you leave this place?"

"I didn't want to tell you," answered the baroness. "But that fellow simply persecutes me with his insistent attentions." And she related a heap of lies. The good lady solaced herself with the illusion that her cousin was pursuing her relentlessly, and all the letters that she had written to him she represented as having been written by him to her.

"Naturally," she went on, "I don't have to go to the end of the world to avoid that ridiculous troubador."

"But there's no train to Cogolludo. You're going to be awfully bored."

"Bah! I'll simply shut myself up in my hut like

a saint, and devote myself to watering my garden and tending my flowers . . . but I am so unlucky that I'm certain some one must have rented the place by now."

"No, I'm sure not. But I really don't see the necessity of your leaving. The boy won't be able to attend school."

"He doesn't need it any more. He'll continue his studies independently."

"Very well. We'll rent the house."

"Yes, for otherwise that low fellow will keep on pestering me. I wish they'd drag him off to jail and hang him! Ah, Don Sergio! When will Carlos VII come? I don't believe in liberty or constitutional guarantees for rascals."

"Come, come, woman. This will all straighten itself out in due season. Take heart, and make haste."

"Thanks, Don Sergio. You were always such a strong man. A rock. . . . A Tarpeian rock. And you don't know where to keep your money. Keep me in mind! You know that I'm a most orderly creature and that I neither stint nor squander."

This was great virtue of the baroness—she knew herself thoroughly.

Once the decision was reached to go to Cogolludo, Niña Chucha and Manuel began to pack the furniture. In the midst of the packing, however, the mulattress remarked that she was very sorry, but that she would remain at a house in Madrid.

"But, my dear girl, what are you going to do?"

The servant, annoyed by these questions, confessed that a young gentleman from South America, a little *rastacouère* who felt homesick for his cocoanut trees, had offered her a place as housekeeper in his apartment.

The baroness did not dare speak of morality, and the sole bit of advice that she offered was, that if the South American were not to content himself simply with her services as housekeeper, she had better watch out for her interests; but the girl was no fool and, as she said, had already taken all precautions to land safely, on both her feet.

Manuel was left alone in the house to finish the tasks necessary to the removal. One afternoon, as he was returning from the Estación del Mediodía, he came upon Mingote, who, the moment he spied Manuel, ran after him.

"Where are you rushing?" he panted. "Any one would have thought that you were trying to get away from me."

"I? What nonsense! I'm very glad to see you."

"I, too."

"What do you say to going into this café? I'll pay for the drinks."

"Come on."

They walked into the Café de Zaragoza. Mingote ordered two coffees, note paper, pen and ink.

"Would you mind writing something that I'll dictate to you?"

"Well, that depends upon what it is."

"All I want you to do is to write a letter telling me that you're not Sergio Figueroa but Manuel Alcázar."

"And what do you want me to write that for? Don't you know it as well as I do?" asked Manuel, innocently.

"Oh, it's a plan I'm working on."

"And what is there in it for me?"

"Thirty duros."

"You mean it? Hand 'em over!"

"No, not now. When the deal is put through."

Finding Manuel so favourably inclined, Mingote told him that if he could manage to steal the forged documents of his paternity from the baroness and hand them over to him, he'd add twenty more duros to the thirty already offered.

"I have the papers put away," said Manuel. "If you'll wait here a moment I'll bring them to you at once."

"Fine. I'll be waiting here. What a sorry idiot this boy is," thought Mingote. "He really imagines that I'm going to give him fifty duros. The fool!"

An hour went by; then another. No Manuel was forthcoming.

"Can the idiot have been myself?" exclaimed Mingote. "No doubt about it. Can that damned kid have fooled me?"

While Mingote stood there waiting, the baroness and Manuel had taken the train.

They reached Cogolludo and the baroness was bitterly disappointed. She had thought that the town would be a sort of gipsy hamlet, and instead she found an ugly village in the midst of a plain.

The house she had rented was on the outskirts of the village; it was spacious, with a blue door, three tiny windows peeping on to the road, and a poultry-yard in the rear. It must have been standing vacant for the past ten years. On the day after they arrived the baroness and Manuel swept and cleaned and dusted. The poor woman bitterly lamented her action.

"Oh, God in heaven, what a house!" she wailed. "What ever in the world did we come here for? And such a village! I had caught a passing glimpse of one or more towns in Spain, but in the North, where there are trees. This is so dry, so barren!"

Manuel was in his glory; the land near the house produced only nettles and dwarf elders, but he imagined that he could transform that patch of earth, so parched and stifled with noxious growths, into a flourishing garden. He set to work with a right good will.

First he weeded the ground and then burned all the grass of the garden.

Then he ploughed up the earth with a goad, and planted chick-peas, kidney-beans and potatoes indiscriminately, without troubling to find out whether it was the proper time for sowing. Then he spent hour after hour drawing water from an exceedingly deep well that was situated in the middle of the

garden; and as the rope scraped his skin, and, moreover, the soil would be dry within a half hour of watering, he contrived a sort of winch with the aid of which it took him half an hour to draw a bucket of water.

After they had been there a fortnight, the baroness engaged a servant, and when the house was thoroughly cleaned, she went off to Madrid, took Kate from school, and brought her to Cogolludo.

Kate, being of a practical turn of mind, filled several flower-pots with earth and planted various flowers in them.

"Why do you do that?" asked Manuel, "since the whole place will be covered with blossoms in a short time?"

"I want to have my own," answered the girl.

A month passed, and despite Manuel's exertions, not a seed sown by him showed any signs of sprouting. Only a few geraniums and some garlic planted by the servant grew admirably, despite the dryness.

Kate's pots likewise prospered; during the height of the day's heat she would take them indoors and water them. Manuel, beholding the ignominious failure of his horticultural efforts, devoted himself energetically to the extermination of the wasps, who took shelter in large honeycombs of cells symmetrically arranged, hidden in the interstices of the tiles.

He waged a war to the death against the wasps, but could not conquer them; it seemed that they had conceived a hatred for him; they launched such furious attacks against him that most of the time he

had to beat a retreat, and was exposed to the danger of falling from the roof riddled with stings.

Kate's diversions were of a less strenuous, more pacific nature. She had arranged her room in perfect order. She knew how to beautify everything. With the bed covered by a white quilt and hidden by curtains, the flower-pots on the window ledge already showing signs of sprouting, her wardrobe, and the chromographs on the blue walls, her bedchamber assumed an aspect of charming grace.

Then she was an affable, even-tempered lass.

She had found a wounded cat in the fields, which some urchins had been chasing with stones. She picked it up, at the risk of being scratched, took care of it, and nursed it back to health. Now the cat followed her wherever she went and would stay only with her.

Manuel obeyed La Nena blindly, and felt, moreover, an intense satisfaction in this obedience. He looked upon her as a paragon of perfection, yet despite this, not even in his innermost self, did it ever occur to him to fall in love with her. Perhaps he considered her too good for him, too beautiful. Manuel experienced the paradoxical tendency of all imaginative men who believe that they love perfection and then fall in love with imperfection.

The summer went by pleasantly. The chalky old fellow came twice to Cogolludo, and was seemingly content. At the end of August, however, the pesetas that the baroness regularly received did not put in their appearance.

She wrote several times to Don Sergio, pleading

again the persecution of which she was the victim, for in this wise she satisfied both her vanity and the self-conceit of "old Cromwell." But Don Sergio did not fall into the trap.

There could be no doubt about it; Mingote had informed. For a while the baroness bided her time, obtaining money on one pretext or another, piling up debts. One day, toward the beginning of autumn, the house agent appeared, requesting her to vacate the premises, as they had not paid the rent in Madrid. The baroness broke into insults, and tore to pieces the character of Don Sergio; the guard, however, said that his orders were not to permit the removal of the furniture before he was paid the rent. The baroness was overwhelmed to think that her daughter would learn of her wicked life; she calculated the value of the furniture, which even in Madrid, with the forced sale of some and the pawning of other pieces, had been reduced to those articles which were strictly indispensable, and made up her mind to leave them behind and flee from Cogolludo.

One afternoon when they left the village for a stroll, the baroness explained the situation to Kate, who received the news in utter confusion.

"Shall we go to Madrid?" she concluded.

"Let's go," said Kate.

"This very moment?"

"This very moment."

"It's cold. It's beginning to drizzle."

The railway station was in a nearby village. Manuel knew the way. The three of them strode

along amid low hillocks; they met nobody. Kate was still somewhat upset.

"We must look pretty queer," said the baroness.

About an hour and a half after having left the village, suddenly, around a bend in the road, they sighted the semaphore of the railroad,—a white disc that looked like a gaunt spectre. A barely perceptible breeze was blowing. Soon they heard from a distance the shrill whistle of the locomotive; then came gleams of the red and white lanterns on the engine, which grew rapidly in the darkness; the earth trembled, the cars thundered by with an infernal roar, a puff of white smoke rolled up, shot through with luminous incandescencies, and fell in a shower of sparks to the ground. The train sped on, leaving two lanterns, one red and the other green, dancing in the gloom of the night, until they, too, were engulfed in the darkness. By the time they entered the station the three were exhausted. They waited several hours, and on the morning of the following day they arrived in Madrid.

The baroness was worried. They went to a lodging-house; they were asked whether they had any luggage; the baroness answered no, and could find no pretext or explanation. They were told that they could not be accommodated without luggage, unless they paid in advance, and the baroness left in shame. Thence they proceeded to the house of a friend, but she had moved away. Neither did they know Horacio's whereabouts. The baroness was compelled to pawn Kate's watch and the trio took rooms in a third-class hotel.

On the fourth day their money gave out. The baroness had lost her self-composure, and her features betrayed her weariness and discouragement.

She wrote a humble letter to her brother-in-law, begging hospitality for herself and daughter. The answer was slow in coming. The baroness hid from Kate, to cry her fill.

The proprietress of the hotel presented their account; the baroness entreated her to wait a few days until a certain letter should come, but the landlady, who would not have been perturbed by the request made in some other form, imagined from the tones employed by the baroness that deception was afoot, so she answered that she would not wait, and that, if on the next day she were not paid, she would notify the police.

Kate, seeing that her mother was more troubled than ever, asked her what was the matter. The baroness explained the dire straits in which they found themselves.

"I'm going to see the ambassador of my country," declared Kate with determination.

"You, alone? I'll go with you."

"No, let Manuel accompany me."

The two went off to the Embassy; they entered through a wide doorway. Kate handed her card to an attendant and was admitted at once. Manuel, seated on a bench, waited for fifteen minutes. At the end of this time the maiden came out in company of a venerable old man.

He saw her to the door and spoke to a uniformed lackey.

The lackey opened the door of a carriage that stood opposite the entrance and remained standing with his hat in his hand.

Kate bade the old gentleman good-bye. Then she said to Manuel:

"Come along."

She stepped into the carriage, followed by the astounded Manuel.

"Everything's all arranged," said the girl to Manuel. "The ambassador has telephoned to the hotel requesting them to send the bill to the Embassy."

Manuel noticed on this occasion, and in later years more than once corroborated the observation, that women accustomed from childhood to submit and to conceal their desires, possess, when their hidden energies are brought into play, a most extraordinary power.

The baroness received the news in astonishment and in an access of tenderness showered kisses upon Kate, weeping bitterly as she did so.

Some days later there came an answer from the baroness's brother-in-law, together with a check covering the expenses of the journey.

Despite what the baroness had promised Manuel, he knew that he would not be taken along. It was natural. The baroness bought some clothes for La Nena and herself.

One autumn afternoon mother and daughter de-

parted. Manuel accompanied them to the station.

The baroness was deeply depressed to think of leaving Madrid; La Nena was, as always, apparently serene.

During the ride none of the three spoke a word.

They stepped out of the carriage into the waiting-room; there was a trunk to be registered; Manuel saw to it. Then they went to the platform and took seats in a second-class coach. Roberto, pale, was pacing up and down the platform.

The baroness promised the boy that they would return.

The station bell rang. Manuel stepped into the coach.

"Better be getting off," said the baroness. "The train is about to start."

Manuel offered his hand timidly to La Nena.

"Embrace her," said her mother.

Manuel scarcely dared to put his arms around the maiden's waist. The baroness kissed him upon both cheeks.

"Good-bye, Manuel," she said, wiping a tear.

The train started; La Nena waved her hand from the window; one car after another rumbled along the tracks; the locomotive gathered speed. Manuel grew heavy hearted. On sped the train, whistling through the fields, as Manuel raised his hands to his eyes and felt that he was weeping.

Roberto clutched his arm.

"Let's get out of here."

"Is that you?" asked Manuel.

"Yes."

"They were very good to me," commented Manuel, sadly.

# PART TWO

# CHAPTER I

Sandoval—Sánchez Gómez's "Toads"—Jacob and Jesús.

MANUEL and Roberto left the station together.

"Are you going to begin your old life all over again?" asked Roberto. "Why don't you make up your mind once and for all to go to work?"

"Where? I'm no good at hunting for a job. Do you know anything I could get? Some printing shop. . . ."

"Would you be willing to go in as an apprentice, without any pay?"

"Yes. What will it be?"

"If you've no objections, I'll take you this instant to the head of a certain newspaper. Come along."

They ascended to the Plaza de San Marcial, then went on through the Calle de los Reyes to the Calle de San Bernardo; reaching the Calle del Pez they entered a house. They knocked at a door on the main floor; a scrawny woman appeared, informing them that the gentleman whom Roberto had called for was asleep and had left word not to be disturbed.

"I'm a friend of his," answered Roberto. "I'll wake him up."

The two made their way through a corridor to a

dark room that reeked foully with iodoform. Roberto knocked.

"Sandoval!"

"What's the trouble? What's the matter?" shouted a powerful voice.

"It's I; Roberto."

There came the sounds of a man in his underclothes stepping out of bed and opening the shutters of the balcony; then they could see him return to his spacious bed.

He was a man of about forty, chubby-cheeked, corpulent, with a black beard.

"What's the time?" he asked, stretching his limbs.

"Ten."

"The devil, you say! As early as that? I'm glad you woke me; I've so many things to do. Shout down the corridor for me, will you."

Roberto yelled a sonorous "Eh!" whereupon a painted girl walked into the room in evident ill-humor.

"Go fetch my clothes," ordered Sandoval, and with an effort he sat up in bed, yawned stupidly and began to scratch his arms.

"What brings you here?" he queried.

"Well, you remember you told me the other day that you needed a boy in the office. I've brought you this one."

"Why, man, I've already hired another."

"Then there's nothing to be done."

"But I believe they need one at the printing shop."

"Sánchez Gómez doesn't think much of me."

"I'll talk to him. He can't refuse me this."

"Will you forget?"

"No, no I'll not."

"Bah! Write him; that would be better."

"Very well. I'll write him."

"No. This very moment. Just a few words."

As they spoke, Manuel observed the room with intense curiosity; it was unbelievably upset and filthy. The furniture comprised—the bed, a commode, an iron washstand, a shelf and two broken chairs. The commode and the shelf were heaped with papers and books whose binding was falling away. On the chairs lay petticoats and dresses. The floor was littered with cigar stubs, scraps of newspaper and pieces of absorbent cotton that had been used in some cure or other. Under the table reposed an iron wash bowl that had been converted into a brasier and was full of ashes and cinders.

When the servant-girl returned with Sandoval's shirt and outer garments he got up in his drawers and began a search amidst his papers for a cake of soap, finally locating it. He washed himself in the basin of the washstand, which was brimming with dirty water wherein swam wisps of woman's hair.

"Would you mind throwing out the water?" asked the journalist humbly of the maid.

"Throw it out yourself," she snarled, leaving the room.

Sandoval went out into the corridor in his drawers, basin in hand, then returned, washed, and began to dress.

Here and there on the books lay a grimy comb, a broken toothbrush reddened with blood from gums, a collar edged with dirt, a rice-powder box full of dents with the puff black and hardened.

After Sandoval had dressed he became transformed in Manuel's eyes; he took on an air of distinction and elegance. He wrote the letter that was asked of him, whereupon Roberto and Manuel left the house.

"He's in there cursing away at us," commented Roberto.

"Why?"

"Because he's as lazy as a Turk. He'll forgive anything except being made to work."

Again they found themselves on the Calle de San Bernardo, and entered a lane that cut across. They paused before a tiny structure that jutted out from the line of the other buildings.

"This is the printing-shop," said Roberto.

Manuel looked about him. Not a sign, no lettering, no indication whatsoever that this was a printery. Roberto thrust aside a little gate and they walked into a gloomy cellar that received its scanty light through the doorway leading to a dank, dirty patio. A recently whitewashed partition that bore the imprints of fingers and entire hands divided this basement into two compartments. In the first were packed a heap of dustladen objects; the other, the inner one, seemed to have been varnished black; a window gave it light; nearby rose a narrow, slippery stairway that disappeared into the ceiling. In the middle of this second compartment a bearded fel-

low, dark and thin, was mounted beside a large press, placing the paper, which there appeared as white as snow, over the bed of the machine; another man was receiving it. In a corner the oil motor that supplied the power to the press was toiling painfully on.

Manuel and Roberto climbed the stairway to a long, narrow room which received light through two windows that looked into the patio.

Against the wall of the room, and in the middle as well, stood the printer's cases, over which hung several electric lights wrapped in newspaper cones that served as shades.

Three men and a boy were at work before the cases; one of the men, a lame fellow in a long blue smock, a derby, with a sour face and spectacles on his nose, was pacing up and down the room.

Roberto greeted the lame fellow and handed him Sandoval's letter. The man took the letter and growled ill-naturedly:

"I don't know why they come to me with matters of this kind. Damn it all! . . ."

"This is the youngster who is to learn the trade," interrupted Roberto, coldly.

"Learn hell . . ." and the cripple spat out ten or a dozen curses and a string of blasphemies.

"Are you in bad humor today?"

"I'm as I darn please. . . . This cursed daily grind. . . . It drives me to desperation. . . . Understand?"

"Indeed, I do," replied Roberto, adding, in a stage "aside" such as is heard by the entire audito-

mum, "What patience one requires with this animal!"

"This is certainly a joke," continued the cripple, unheedful of the "aside." "Suppose the kid does want to learn the trade. What's that got to do with me? And suppose he has nothing to eat? How does that concern me? Let him go to the deuce out of here . . . and good riddance."

"Are you going to teach him or not, Señor Sánchez? I'm a busy man and have no time to waste."

"Ah! No time to waste! Then clear out, my fine fellow. I don't need you here at all. Let the kid remain. You're in the way here."

"Thanks. You stay here," said Roberto to Manuel. "They'll tell you what you have to do."

Manuel stood perplexed; he saw his friend disappear, looked around him in every direction, and seeing that nobody paid any attention to him, he walked over to the stairway and descended two steps.

"Eh! Where are you going?" shouted the lame man after him. "Do you want to learn the trade or not? What do you call this?"

Manuel was more confused than ever.

"Hey, you, Yaco," shouted the cripple, turning to one of the men at the cases. "Teach this kid the case."

The man he had called,—a puny fellow, very swarthy, with a black beard,—was working away with astonishing rapidity. He cast an indifferent glance in Manuel's direction and resumed his work.

The youngster stood there motionless. Seeing

him thus, the other typesetter, a blond young fellow with a sickly look, turned to his bearded companion jestingly and said to him in a queer singsong:

"Ah, Yaco! Why don't you teach the boy the position of the letters?"

"Teach him yourself," retorted he whom they called Yaco.

"Ah, Yaco, I see that the law of Moses makes you people very selfish, Yaco. You don't want to waste any time, do you, Yaco?"

The bearded compositor glared at his companion with a sinister look; the blond fellow burst into laughter and then showed Manuel where the various letters of the alphabet were to be found; then he brought over a column of used type which he had drawn quickly from an iron form, and said:

"Now you're to distribute every letter back into its proper box."

Manuel began the task at an exceedingly slow pace.

The blond compositor wore a long blue smock and a derby perched on one side of his head. Bent over the case, his eyes very close to his copy, with his composing-stick in his left hand, he set up one line after the other with astonishing speed; his right hand leaped dizzyingly from box to box.

Often he would pause to light a cigarette, look at his bearded companion and in a very jovial tone ask him a question,—either a very silly one or such as admits of no possible reply,—to which the other

man answered only with a sinister glance from his black eyes.

It struck twelve; everybody ceased working and went out. Manuel was left alone in the shop. At first he had harbored the hope that he would be given something to eat; then he came to the realization that nobody had given himself any concern as to his food. He reconnoitred the place; nothing in the premises, unfortunately, was edible; he wondered whether, if he were to remove the ink from the surface of the rollers, they would be palatable, but he arrived at no decision.

Yaco returned at two; shortly after came the blond young man, whose name was Jesús, and the work was resumed. Manuel continued distributing the type, and Jesús and Yaco, setting.

The cripple corrected galleys, inked them, drew proof by placing paper on them and striking it with a mallet, after which, with a pair of tweezers, he would extract certain letters and replace them with others.

At midafternoon Jesús quit setting type and changed work. He took the galleys, which were tied around with twine, loosened them, shaped them into columns, placed them in an iron chase and locked them with quoins.

The form was carried off by one of the pressmen of the basement who returned with it inside of an hour. Jesús replaced some of the columns with others and the form was again removed. Shortly afterward the same operation was repeated.

After working away until seven the men were

about to leave, when Manuel went over to Jesús and asked:

"Won't the boss give me anything to eat?"

"Ho! The idea!"

"I haven't any money; I didn't even have any breakfast."

"You didn't? See here. Come along with me."

They left the printing-shop together and entered a hovel on the Calle de Silva, where Jesús ate. The blond young man engaged in conversation with the proprietor and then came over to Manuel, saying:

"You'll get your meals here on tick. I've told him I'll be responsible for you. Now see to it that you don't be up to any knavish tricks."

"Don't worry."

"Very good. Let's go inside. It's my treat today."

They walked into the dining-room of the shack and sat down before a table.

The waiter brought them a platter of bread, stew and wine. As they ate, Jesús recounted in humorous fashion a number of anecdotes relating to the proprietor of the printing-shop, to the journalists, and, above all, to Yaco, the fellow with the beard, who was a Jew, a very good fellow, but as stingy and sordid as they come.

Jesús would banter him and provoke him just for the sake of listening to his rejoinders.

When they had finished their supper, Jesús asked Manuel:

"Have you a place to sleep?"

"No."

"There must be some corner in the printing-shop."

They returned to the shop and the compositor asked the cripple to let Manuel sleep in some corner.

"Damn it all!" exclaimed the cripple, "this is going to become a regular Mountain Shelter. Such a band of ragamuffins! The lame fellow may be an ill-humoured cuss but everybody comes here just the same. You bet."

Grumbling, as was his wont, the cripple opened a dingy sty that was reached by ascending several stairways; it was cluttered with engravings wrapped in sheets. He pointed to a corner where some excelsior and a few old cloaks were heaped.

Manuel slept like a prince in this hole.

On the next day the owner sent him down to the basement.

"Just watch what this fellow is doing, and you do the same," he instructed, pointing to the thin, bearded man who stood on the platform of the press.

The man was taking a sheet of paper from a pile and placing it upon the feed board; at once the grippers reached forward and seized the sheet with the certainty of fingers; at a movement of the wheel the machine would swallow the paper and within a moment the sheet would issue, printed on one side, and some small sticks, like the ribs of a fan, would deposit it upon the fly table. Manuel very soon acquired the necessary skill.

The proprietor arranged that Manuel should

work mornings at the cases, and afternoons and part of the night at the press, paying him for this a daily wage of six reales. During the afternoons it was fairly possible to stand the toil in the cellar; at night it was beyond endurance. Between the gasoline motor and the oil lamps the air was asphyxiating.

After a week in the place, Manuel had become intimate with Jesús and Yaco.

Jesús advised Manuel to apply himself to the cases and learn as soon as possible how to set type.

"At least you'll be sure of making a living."

"But it's very hard," said Manuel.

"Bah, man. Once you get used to it, it's far easier than rolling off a log."

Manuel worked away at the cases whenever he could, trying his best to acquire speed; some nights he actually set up lines, and how proud it made him afterward to see them in print!

Jesús amused himself by teasing the Jew, mimicking his manner of speech. They had both been living for some months in the same tenement, Yaco (his real name was Jacob) with his family and Jesús with his two sisters.

Jesús delighted to drive Jacob out of all patience and hear him utter picturesque maledictions in his soft, mellifluous language with its long-drawn s's.

According to Jesús, at Jacob's home his wife, his father-in-law and he himself spoke the weirdest jargon imaginable,—a mixture of Arabic and archaic Spanish that sounded exceedingly rare.

"Do you remember, Yaco," Jesús would ask, im-

itating the Jew's pronunciation, "when you brought your wife, Mesoda, that canary? And she asked you: 'Ah, Yaco, what sort of bird is this with yellow wings?' And you answered her: 'Ah, Mesoda! This bird is a canary and I have brought it for you.' "

Jacob, seeing everybody laugh at him, would cast a terrible glance at Jesús and cry out:

"Wretch that you are! May you be struck by a dart that blots out your name from the book of the living!"

"And when Mesoda said to you," continued Jesús, " 'Stay here, Yaco, stay with me. Ah, Yaco, how ill I am! I have a dove in my heart, a hammer on each breast and a fish on my neck. Call my *baba;* have her bring me a twig of *letuario,* Yaco!' "

These domestic intimacies, thus treated in jest, exasperated Jacob; hearing them, he lost his temper completely and his imprecations outdistanced those of Camilla.

"You have no respect for the family, you dog," he would conclude.

"The family!" Jesús would retort. "The first thing a fellow should do is forget it. Parents, brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins,—what are they all but a botheration? The first thing a man should learn is to disobey his parents and have no belief in God."

"Silence, you infidel, silence! May your sides fill up with watery vapor and your heart be consumed with fire. May the black broom sweep you off if you continue such blasphemies."

Jesús would greet these curses with laughter, and after having allowed Jacob to vent his wrath, would add:

"A couple of thousand years ago, this animal who's nothing but a printer today would have been a prophet, and would be in the Bible together with Matthew, Zabulon and all that small fry."

"Don't talk nonsense," snarled Jacob.

When the discussion was over, Jesús would say to him:

"You know very well, Yaco, that a chasm yawns between your ideas and mine; but despite all that, if you'll accept the invitation of a Christian, I invite you to a glass."

Jacob would nod acceptance.

## CHAPTER II

The Names of the "Toads"—The Director of *Los Debates* and His Editorial Staff

SÁNCHEZ GÓMEZ the printer, who was also known by the nickname Plancheta, was a wealthy man, though he toiled away daily like a common workman. He was a person of diabolically uneven temper, of corrosive joviality and, at bottom, good-hearted.

He was the most picturesque and versatile printer in Madrid, and his business was likewise the most complicated and interesting.

One thing alone was sufficient to give the measure of the man: with a single press, run by a gasoline engine of the old type, he published nine newspapers, the titles of which no one could call insignificant.

*Los Debates* (Debates): *El Porvenir* (The Future); *La Nación* (The Nation); *La Tarde* (Afternoon); *El Radical* (The Radical); *La Mañana* (Morning); *El Mundo* (The World); *El Tiempo* (The Times); and *La Prensa* (The Press); all these important dailies were born in the basement of the printery. To any ordinary man this would appear impossible; for Sánchez Gómez, that Proteus of Typography, the word impossible existed only in the dictionary.

Each of these important newspapers had a column of its own; all the rest, news, literary articles, advertisements, feuilletons, announcements, was common to them all.

Sánchez Gómez, in his newspapers, paired individualism and collectivism. Each of his organs enjoyed absolute autonomy and independence, and yet, each resembled the other as closely as two drops of water. The lame fellow thus realized in his publications unity and variety.

*El Radical,* for example, a rabidly Republican paper, devoted its first column to attacking the Government and the priesthood; but its news items were the same as those of *El Mundo,* an impenitently conservative daily which employed its first column in defense of the church, that Holy Ark of our traditions; the Monarchy, that glorious institution, symbol of our Fatherland; the Army, most powerful bulwark of our nationality; the Constitution, that compendium of our public liberties. . . .

Of all the newspapers printed there, *Los Debates* alone constituted a profitable venture for its proprietor, Don Pedro Sampayo y Sánchez del Pelgar. *Los Debates*—using the figures of speech employed in the daily—was a terrible battering-ram against the purse of the politicians, an inexpugnable fortress for the needs of the creditors.

Blackmail, in the hands of the newspaper director, was converted into a terrible weapon; neither the ancient catapult nor the modern cannon could be compared with it.

The newspaper owned by Don Pedro Sampayo y

Sánchez del Pelgar had three columns of its own.

These columns were written by a huge, thick-set Galician of most uncouth appearance, named González Parla, who wielded a pen that went straight to the point, and by a certain Señor Fresneda, as thin as a rail, exceedingly delicate, well dressed and always starving.

Langairiños, the Superman, was on the staff of *Los Debates,* but only as an aliquot part, since his works of genius were printed in the nine toads that were born daily in Sánchez Gómez's printery.

It is high time that we introduced Langairiños. The newspaper-men called him Superman in jest,—Super for short—, because he was forever prating about the coming of Nietzsche's superman; they did not realize that, jest or no jest, they but did him justice.

He was the highest, the loftiest of the editorial staff; sometimes he signed himself Máximo, at others, Mínimo; but his name,—his real name, that which he immortalized daily, and increasingly every day, in *Los Debates,* or in *El Tiempo, El Mundo* or *El Radical,* was Ernesto Langairiños.

Langairiños! A sweet, sonorous name, somewhat like a cool zephyr in a summer twilight. Langairiños! A dream.

The great Langairiños was between thirty and forty; a pronounced abdomen, aquiline nose and a strong, thick black beard.

One of the imbeciles among his enemies, seeing him so vertebrate and cerebral,—one of those vipers who try to sink their fangs into the armour of

great personalities,—asseverated that Langairiños's appearance was grotesque. A false statement whichever way you look at it, for, despite the fact that his attire did not respond to the requirements of the most foppish dandyism; despite the fact that his trousers were always baggy and frayed, and his sack-coats studded with constellations of stains; despite all this, his natural elegance, his air of superiority and distinction erased these minor imperfections, even as the waves of the sea wipe out tracks upon the sand of the beach.

Langairiños practised criticism, and a cruel criticism it was. His articles appeared simultaneously in nine newspapers. His impressionistic manner scorned such banal phrases as "La Señorita Pérez rose to great heights," "the characters of the work are well sustained," and others of the same class.

In two apothegms the Superman concentrated all his ideas as to the world that surrounded him. They were two terrible sentences, in a bitter, lacerating style. If any one asserted that such and such a politician or journalist had influence, money or ability, he would reply: "Yes, yes, I know whom you mean." And if another announced that a certain novelist or dramatist was at work upon a new book or piece, or had just finished one, he would answer: "Very good; very good. Through the other door."

Langairiños's superior type of mind did not permit him to suppose that any man other than himself could be any better than another.

His masterpiece was an article entitled "They're All Ragamuffins." It was a conversation between a master of journalism—himself—and a cub reporter.

This avalanche of Attic salt concluded with the following gem of humour:

*The Cub Reporter:* One must have principles.

*The Master:* At table.

*The Cub Reporter:* The country should be told things straight from the shoulder.

*The Master:* It would get indigestion. Remember the boarding-house peas.

That was the Superman's regular style, a terrible, Shakesperian manner.

As a result of the cerebral exhaustion produced by these intellectual labours, the Super was troubled with neurasthenia, and as a cure for his ailment he took glycerophosphate of lime with his meals and did gymnastics.

Manuel recalled having often heard in Doña Casiana's boarding-house a sonorous voice bravely and untiringly counting the number of leg and arm flexions. Twenty-five . . . twenty-six . . . twenty-seven, until a hundred or more was reached. That Bayard of Callisthenics was none other than Langairiños.

The other two editors could not be likened unto Langairiños. González Parla, with that porter's face of his, looked like a barbarian. He was brutally frank; he called a spade a spade, politicians leeches and the newspapers printed by Sánchez Gómez, *the toads*.

The other editor, Fresneda, outrivalled in finesse the most tactful and effeminate man that could be found in Madrid. He experienced a veritable delight in calling everybody Señor. Fresneda managed only by a miracle to keep alive. He spent his whole life starving, yet this roused no wrath in his soul.

In order to get Sampayo, proprietor of *Los Debates,* to pay them a few pesetas, González Parla and Fresneda were compelled to resort to all manner of expedients. The hope harbored by the pair, which was a credential obtained through the proprietary director, was never realized.

Manuel had heard so much talk about Sampayo that he was curious to make his acquaintance.

He was a tall, erect gentleman, of noble appearance, about sixty-odd years old; various times he had filled the office of Governor, thanks to his wife, a fine-looking female who in her halcyon days had been able to wheedle anything out of a Minister. Wherever this couple had passed through in the course of the husband's official duties, not a nail was left in the wall.

Sampayo's wife was very friendly with certain wealthy gentlemen, but in just reciprocity, so superwomanly and tolerant she was, she always picked out good-looking, obliging maids, so that her husband should have no cause for complaint.

And what a human spectacle their home presented! At times, when Señora de Sampayo returned somewhat weary after one of her little adventures, she would find her noble-looking husband

dining hand in hand with the maid, if not embracing her tenderly.

The couple squandered their entire income; but Sampayo was so skilful in the art of making creditors and then fighting them off, that they always managed to raise a few coins.

Once when González Parla, who was in an ugly mood, and Fresneda, as amiable as ever, called on Sampayo, addressing him every other moment as the Director Señor Sampayo, and explained to him the dire straits in which they found themselves, the director gave Fresneda a letter to a South American general, asking for some money. Sampayo imposed upon his editor the condition that all over ten duros should go to the newspaper cash-box.

When the two editors reached the street, González Parla asked his companion for the letter, and the spectral journalist handed it to him.

"I'll go to see this knave of a general," promised González Parla, "and I'll get the money from him. Then we'll divide it. Half for you and the other half for me."

The skinny editor accompanied the corpulent to the general's house.

The general, a little Mexican, dressed like a macaw, read the director's letter, looked at the journalist, readjusted his spectacles and eyed him from top to bottom, asking:

"Are you *Señó* Fresneda?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course. I'm the man."

"But you're consumptive, aren't you?"

"I? No, sir."

"Well, that's what they tell me in this letter, understand? . . . That you have seven children and that from your looks I can understand that you're in the final stage of consumption, see?"

González Parla was non-plussed. He confessed that it was true he did not have consumption; but he had had a consumptive father, and since his father had suffered from tuberculosis, the doctors had told him that he, too, would contract it,—that, indeed, he was already in the early stages, so that if he were as yet not really consumptive, it was almost the same as if he were.

"I don't understand all this, see?" said the general, after listening to so defective an explanation. "I do gather, though, that this is a hoax. How can a fellow be so fat and yet be sick, hey? But, anyway," and he handed out a bill folded between his fingers, "take this and be off with you, and don't be such a faker."

"This corpulency is misleading," replied González Parla humbly, accepting the bill. "It's due to all the potatoes I eat." And he disappeared in shame, as fast as he could.

The note was for a hundred pesetas, and the skinny editor divided it with the corpulent, to the great indignation of Sampayo. The director vowed that he would not pay them a céntimo for months and months.

Once, Fresneda reduced to the final gasps of hunger, uttered the sole energetic sentence of his entire career.

"I'll write you a recommendation to the Ministry," the director had said to him, in answer to a request for money.

"To die of hunger, Señor de Sampayo," Fresneda had replied, with a flash of independence not devoid of his proverbial finesse, "one does not require letters of recommendation."

## CHAPTER III

The Santa Casilda Hostelry—Jacob's History—La Fea and La Sinforosa—The Motherless Child—A not Very Merry Christmas

BY the time spring came around Manuel was setting type with ease. Somewhat later, the third compositor left, and Jesús advised the boss to let Manuel fill the vacancy.

"But he doesn't know anything," replied the owner.

"What need he know? Pay him by the line."

"No. I'll raise his daily wage."

"How much are you going to give him?"

"Eight reales."

"That's too little. The other fellow got twelve."

"Very well. I'll give him nine. But let him not come here to sleep."

Manuel's new position freed him from the duty of sweeping the shop. He abandoned the sty in which he had been sleeping. Jesús took him to the Santa Casilda hostelry, where he himself stayed; it was a huge, one-story structure with three very large patios, situated on the Ronda de Toledo. Manuel would have preferred not to return to this section, which was linked in his memory to so many unpleasant recollections; but his friendship with Jesús

won him over. He got, at the hostelry, for a fortnightly rent of eight reales, a tiny room with a bed, a broken reed chair and a mat hanging from the ceiling and serving as the door. When the wind blew from the direction of the fields of San Isidro, the rooms and the corridors of the Santa Casilda hostelry were filled with smoke. The patios of the place were more or less like those at Uncle Rilo's house, with identical galleries and numbered doors.

From the window of Manuel's den could be seen three red, round-paunched tanks of the gashouse, with their lofty iron girders that ended in pulleys at the top; round about was the Rastro; to one side, dumping-places blackened with coal and slag; farther on stretched the arid landscape, the yellow slopes of which climbed into the horizon. Directly before him rose the Los Ángeles hill with the hermitage on its crest.

In the very next room to that which Manuel occupied were a carpenter, his wife and a child. The couple would get drunk and beat the child unmercifully.

Many a time Manuel was on the point of bursting into the room, for it seemed to him that those beasts were torturing the little girl.

One morning, encountering the carpenter's wife, he said to her:

"Why do you beat that poor little girl so?"

"Is it any of your business?"

"It certainly is."

"Isn't she my daughter? I can do what I please with her."

"That's what your mother should have done with you," retorted Manuel. "Beat the life out of you for a witch."

The woman grumbled something or other and Manuel went off to the printing-shop.

That night the carpenter stopped Manuel.

"What was it you said to my wife, eh?"

"I told her that she oughtn't to beat her daughter."

"And who told you to mix into this business?"

The carpenter was a ferocious-looking fellow with a wide, bulging space between his eyebrows, and a bull neck. His forehead was crossed by a swollen vein. Manuel made no reply.

Fortunately for him the carpenter and his wife soon moved from the place.

In the holes of the same corridor there lived also two aged gipsies together with their families, both exceedingly noisy and thievish; a blind maiden who sang gipsy songs in the streets, wiggling with epileptic convulsions, and who was accompanied by another lass with whom she was for ever fighting, and two very cheap, very slovenly sisters, with painted cheeks and loud voices,—a pair of lying, quarrelsome strumpets, but as happy as goats.

Jesús's room was near Manuel's, and this life in common both at the printing-shop and at the house tightened the bonds of their friendship.

Jesús was an excellent youth, but he got drunk with lamentable frequency. He had two maiden sisters, one a pretty chit with green cat's eyes and an impudent face, called La Sinforosa, and the other a

sickly creature, all twisted and scrofulous, whom everybody heartlessly called La Fea, ugly.

After they had been living thus for two months or so at the hostelry, Jesús, in his peculiar, ironic tone, remarked one day to Manuel on the way to the shop:

"Did you hear? My sister is pregnant."

"That so?"

"That's what."

"Which of the two?"

"La Fea. I wonder who the hero could have been. He deserves a cross of valour."

The compositor continued to prattle about the misfortune, jesting upon it indifferently.

This did not appear very just to Manuel; after all, she was the man's sister. But Jesús launched forth with his invectives against the family, declaring that a fellow need not concern himself about his brothers and sisters, his parents, or anybody.

"A fine theory for egotists," answered Manuel.

"Why, the family is nothing but egotism that favours a few as against humanity," agreed Jesús.

"Much you care about humanity. As little as for your family," retorted Manuel.

This topic was the theme of a number of other discussions, in the heat of which they spoke some bitter, mortifying words to each other.

Manuel was not much concerned about the theoretical problem. What did fill him with indignation, however, was to see that Jesús and La Sinforosa took no pity upon their sister, sending her on errands and making her sweep the place when the

poor rachitic creature couldn't stir because of her huge abdomen, which threatened to become monstrous. As a result of these altercations there were days on which Manuel exchanged scarcely two words with Jesús, preferring to chat with Jacob and ask him questions about his native land.

Jacob, despite the fact that he was always lamenting the evil days he had suffered in his country, was fond of speaking about it.

He came from Fez and was wildly enthusiastic over that city.

He depicted it as a paradise flourishing with gardens, palm-trees, lemon and orange trees, and beribboned with crystalline streamlets. In Fez, in the Jewish quarter Jacob had passed his childhood, until he entered the service of a wealthy merchant who did business in Rabat, Mogador and Saffi.

With his lively imagination and his exaggerated speech, which was so picturesque and thronged with imagery, Jacob communicated an impression of reality whenever he spoke of his country.

He pictured the procession of the caravans composed of camels, asses and dromedaries. These last he described with their long necks and their small heads, swaying like those of serpents, with their dull eyes directed toward the sky. As one listened to him at the height of his evocations one imagined that one was crossing those white sands in the blinding sun. He described, too, the markets that were set up at the intersection of several roads and characterized the folk who came to them: the Moors of the nearby Kabyles, with their guns; the serpent

charmers; the sorcerers; the tellers of tales from the Thousand And One Nights, the medicine men who draw worms from human ears.

And as the caravans departed, each proceeding on its different way, the men mounted on their horses and mules, Jacob would imitate the cawing of the crows that swooped down in flocks upon the market place and covered it with a black cloak.

He pictured the effect of beholding thirty or forty Berbers on horseback, with their flowing locks, armed with long muskets. As they passed a Jew they would spit upon the ground. He told of the uncertain life there; on the roads, earless, armless folk, victims of justice, begging alms in the name of Muley Edris; during the winter, the dangerous crossing of the rivers, the nights at the gates of the villages, while the *cus-cus* was being prepared, playing the *guembrí* and singing sad, drowsy airs.

One Sabbath Jacob invited Manuel to eat with him at his house.

The Jew lived in the Pozas section, in a ramshackle house on a lane near the Paseo de Areneros.

The tiny structure looked strange, somewhat Oriental. One or two low pine tables; small mats instead of chairs, and, hanging from the walls, coloured cloths and two small three-stringed guitars.

Manuel was introduced to Jacob's father, a long-haired old fellow who walked about the house in a dark tunic and a cap, to his wife, Mesoda, and to a black-eyed child called Aisa.

They all sat down to table; the old man solemnly pronounced a number of words in an involved lan-

guage, which Manuel took for some Hebrew prayer, and then they began to eat.

The meal had a taste of strong aromatic herbs and to Manuel it seemed that he was chewing flowers.

At table the old man, employing that extravagant Castilian in which the entire family spoke, recounted to Manuel the events of the African war. In his version Prim, or, as he referred to him, Señor Juan Prim, assumed epic proportions. Jacob must have respected the old man very deeply, for he allowed him to speak on and on about Prim and about the Almighty. Mesoda, who was very timid, only smiled, and blushed upon the slightest provocation.

After the meal Jacob took down from the wall one of the small three-stringed guitars and sang several Arabian songs, accompanying himself on the primitive instrument.

Manuel bid adieu to Jacob's family and promised to visit them from time to time.

One autumn night, as Manuel was returning from work after a day during which Jesús had not put in an appearance at the shop, he entered the hostelry to find in the corridor leading to his room a knot of women gossiping about Jesús and his sisters.

La Fea had given birth; the doctor from the Emergency Hospital was in her room together with Señora Salomona, a kindly woman who made her living as a nurse.

"But what has Jesús done?" asked Manuel, hear-

ing the insults heaped upon the typesetter by the angry women.

"What has he done?" replied one of them. "Nothing at all, only it's come out that he's been living with La Sinfo, who's the blackest of black sheep. Jesús and she had taken to drink and that big fox of a Sinfo has been taking La Fea's pay from her."

"That can't be true," said Manuel.

"Is that so? Well, Jesús himself was the one to tell it."

"H'm. The other one isn't any too decent herself when it comes to that," interpolated one of the women.

"She's as decent as the best of them," retorted the spokeswoman. "She told everything to the doctor from the Emergency Hospital. One night when she hadn't had a bite in her mouth, because Jesús and La Sinfo had taken every céntimo from her, La Fea went and drank a drop of brandy to quiet her hunger; then she had another; she was so weak that she got drunk right away. In came La Sinfo and Jesús, both stewed to the gills, and the shameless fox, seeing La Fea in bed, said to her, she says: 'Out with you. We need the bed ourselves for . . .' and here she made an indecent gesture. You know what I mean. And she goes and shows her sister the door. La Fea, who was too tipsy to know what was going on, went into the street, and an officer, seeing how drunk she was, took her to the station and shoved her into a dark cell, where some tramp. . ."

"Who must have been drunk himself," interjected a mason, who had paused to hear the story.

"So there you are . . ." concluded the gossip.

"I'll bet that if there had been light in the cell nothing would have happened, for the moment the guy caught sight of that face he would have turned sober with fright," added the mason, continuing on his way.

Manuel left the gabbling women and stopped in the doorway of Jesús's room. It was a desolating spectacle. The typesetter's sister, pale, with closed eyes, thrown across the floor on a few mats and covered with burlap, looked like a corpse. The doctor was bandaging her at that moment. Señora Salomona was dressing the newborn. A pool of blood stained the stone flooring.

Jesús, leaning against the wall in a corner, was gazing impassibly at the doctor and his sister out of glittering eyes.

The physician requested the neighbours to fetch a quilt and a few sheets; when these articles had been brought they placed the quilt upon the mat and laid La Fea carefully into the improvised bed. The poor twisted creature looked like a skeleton; her breasts were as flat as a man's, and though she had no strength to move, when they brought the child to her side she changed position and tried to suckle it.

Gazing upon this scene, Manuel glared angrily at Jesús.

He could have beaten the typesetter with pleasure for having permitted his sister to come to this.

The physician, after having finished his task, took Jesús over to the end of the gallery and engaged in private conversation with him. Jesús was willing to do exactly as he was told; he would give every céntimo of his pay to La Fea, he promised.

Then, when the physician had left, Jesús fell into the hands of the women, who made a rag of him.

He denied nothing. Quite the contrary.

"During her pregnancy," he confessed, "she slept on the floor, on the mat."

The chorus of women received the compositor's words with indignation. He shrugged his shoulders stupidly.

"Just imagine the poor creature sleeping on the mat while La Sinfo and Jesús lay in bed!" exclaimed one.

And higher and higher rose the indignation against La Sinfo, that shameless street-walker, whom they vowed to give an unmerciful drubbing. Señora Salomona had to interrupt their chatter, for it kept the woman in childbed awake.

La Sinfo must have suspected something, for she did not show up at the hostelry. Jesús, frowning glumly, his cheeks aflame and his eyes aglitter, went on the following days from house to shop without a word. Manuel had a notion that the young man was in love with his sister.

During the period of her confinement the neighbours took affectionate care of La Fea. They demanded every céntimo of Jesús's pay, and he surrendered it without any resistance whatsoever.

The newborn child, emaciated and hydrocephalic, died within a week.

La Sinforosa never appeared there again. According to gossip she had gone into the *profession.*

The day before Christmas, toward evening, three gentleman dressed in black came to the place. One was a diminutive old fellow with white moustaches and merry eyes; the second was a stiff gentleman with a greying beard and gold-rimmed spectacles; the other appeared to be a secretary or a clerk, and was short, with black moustaches, burdened with documents and tapping his heels as he walked. It was said that they came from La Conferencia de San Vicente de Paul; they visited Jesús' sister and other persons who lived in the nooks and crannies of the house.

Behind these gentlemen attired in black went Manuel and Jesús, who only slept at the hostelry and did not know the neighbourhood, so that they walked about their own place as strangers.

"Hypocrites!" cried the mason at the top of his voice.

"But, man. Hush!" exclaimed Manuel. "They might hear you."

"And suppose they do?" retorted the neighbour. "Let them! They're nothing but a gang of hypocrites. Who asks them to come here and pretend to be charitable souls? They come here to show off, to put on airs,—that's what they come for. The mountebanks, the Jesuits! What in hell do they want to find out? That we live badly?

That we've turned to swine? That we don't attend to our children? That we get drunk? Very well. Let them give us their money and we'll live better. But don't let them come here with their certificates and their advice."

The three visitors went into a hole a couple of metres square. On the floor, upon a litter of rags and straw, lay a dropsical woman with a swollen, silly face.

A young woman was seated in a chair, sewing by lamplight.

From the corridor Manuel could hear the conversation that was taking place inside.

The little old man with the white moustaches was asking in his merry voice what ailed the woman, and a neighbour who lived in an adjoining room was relating an endless tale of wretchedness and squalor.

The dropsical woman bore her woes with extraordinary resignation.

Misfortune battened upon her and she sank lower and lower until she reached this doleful position. She could not find a friendly hand, and her sole benefactors had been a butcher and his wife, former servants of hers in better days whom she had helped to set up in business. The butcher's wife, who was also a moneylender, used to purchase cloaks and Manila handkerchiefs in the Rastro, and when there was anything to mend or to put into order she would bring it to the invalid's daughter for repair.

This service the former servant rewarded by giving the daughter of her mistress a heap of bones,

and, at times, when she was particularly pleased with a piece of work, by presenting her with the remainders of a meal.

"A hell of a generous lady, the butcher's wife!" commented the mason, who had listened to the neighbour's story.

"Even the common folk," replied Jesús jestingly, recalling a zarzuela refrain, "has its tender heart."

The gentlemen from La Conferencia de Paul, after having heard so moving an account, gave three food tickets to the dropsical woman and left the room.

"Now the woman's happy," muttered Jesús, ironically. "She was going to die tomorrow and now she can last until the day after. What more does she want?"

"I should say," chimed the mason.

The secretary,—the fellow burdened with so many documents, recalled a case similar to that of the dropsical woman, and he declared that it was most curious and extremely interesting.

As the three gentlemen were turning down one corridor to go into another, an old lady approached them, addressing them as "Your grace," and asking them to accompany her. She led the way with a candle to a garret, or, more exactly speaking, a dark nook beneath a staircase. On a heap of rags, wrapped in a frayed cloak, lay an emaciated, filthy little girl, her face dark and wan, her eyes black, shy and glittering. At her side slept a little boy of two or three.

"I wish Your grace would place this little girl in

an asylum," said the old woman. "She's an orphan; her mother, who—begging your pardon—did not lead a very good life, died here. She's planted herself in this hole and nobody can make her stir. She steals eggs, bread, whatever she can lay her hands upon, sometimes in one house, sometimes in another, so that she can feed the baby. I wish you could see that she's placed in an asylum."

The little girl stared out of her large eyes, frightened at sight of the three gentlemen, and seized the infant by the hand.

"This little girl," declared the secretary from behind his bundle of documents, "has a genuinely curious affection for her tiny brother, and I am not sure that it would not be cruel to separate them."

"An asylum would be better," insisted the old woman.

"We'll see. We'll see," replied the old gentleman. The trio took their departure.

"What's your name?" asked Jesús of the girl.

"Me? Salvadora."

"Do you want to come and live with me, together with your little brother?"

"Yes," replied the lass, without a moment's hesitation.

"Very well, then, let's be going. Get up. La Fea will be happy to have them," said Jesús, as if to give an explanation of his impulse. "Otherwise they'll separate this little girl from her brother, and that would be an outrage."

The lass took the babe in her arms and followed Jesús. La Fea must have received the two forsaken

children with intense enthusiasm. Manuel was not present, for a young man had stopped him in the corridor.

"Don't you know me?" he asked directly in front of Manuel.

"Of course, man. . . . You're El Aristón."

"That's me."

"Do you live here?"

"Over in El Corral."

El Corral was one of the patios of the hostelry, and opened upon that pestilential Rastro which extends from La Ronda to the gashouse. El Aristón was as full of necromania as ever. He spoke to Manuel only of deaths, burials and funereal matters.

He told Manuel that on Sundays he visited burial grounds; for he considered it a duty to fulfil that merciful work which bids one to bury the dead.

During the course of the conversation the necromaniac insinuated the notion that if the king were to die they could make a wonderful interment; but despite this, he imagined that the burial of the Pope would be even more sumptuous.

The necromaniac and Manuel passed through several corridors.

"Where are you taking me?" asked Manuel.

"If you want to come, you can see a corpse."

"And what are you going to do with this corpse."

"I'm going to watch over him and pray for him," replied El Aristón.

In a tiny room lighted by two candles stuck in the necks of bottles, there was a dead man stretched out on a mattress. . . .

From afar came the sound of tambourines and songs; from time to time the shrill voice of some drunken old hag would shout:

Ande, ande, ande
la marimorena;
ande, ande, ande,
que es la Nochebuena.

On with the fight,
Let no one grieve.
On with the row,
'Tis Christmas Eve.

In the room where the dead man lay, there was, at that moment, nobody.

## CHAPTER IV

Roberto's Christmas—Northern Folk.

AT this same hour Roberto Hasting, wrapped in his overcoat, was on his way to Bernardo Santín's home. The night was cold; hardly a person was to be seen on the street; the tramcars glided hurriedly over the rails with a gentle drone.

Roberto entered the house, climbed to the top story and knocked. Esther opened the door and he walked in.

"Where's Bernardo?" asked Roberto.

"He hasn't appeared all day," answered the ex-teacher.

"No?"

"No."

Esther, huddled into a shawl, sat down before the table. The room, formerly the photographer's gallery, was lighted by an oil lamp. Everything bore witness to the direst poverty.

"Have they taken away the camera?" asked Roberto?

"Yes. This morning. I have my money locked in this chest. What would you advise me to do, Roberto?"

Roberto strode up and down the room with his

eyes fixed upon the floor. All at once he drew up before Esther.

"Do you wish me to be perfectly frank with you?"

"Yes. Perfectly. Just as you'd speak to a good friend."

"Very well, then. I believe that what you ought to do is—. I don't know whether the advice will strike you as brutal. . . ."

"Go on. . . ."

"What I believe is that you ought to get a separation from your husband."

Esther was silent.

"You've fallen into the hands, not of a knave nor of a beast, but of an unfortunate, a poor imbecile, without talent, without energy, incapable alike of living or of appreciating you."

"What am I to do?"

"What? Return to your old life,—to your piano and English lessons. Would the separation grieve you?"

"No. Quite the contrary. Take my word for it: I haven't the slightest affection for Bernardo. He fills me with pity and aversion. What's more, I never cared for him."

"Then why did you marry him?"

"How do I know? Fate, the treacherous advice of a friend, ignorance of his real character. It was one of those things that are done without knowing why. The very next day I was remorseful."

"I can imagine. When I learned that Bernardo was to be married, I thought to myself: 'It must

be some adventuress who wishes to legalize her situation with a man.' Then, when I got to know you, I asked myself: 'How could this woman have been deceived by so insignificant a creature as Bernardo? There's no explanation. No money, no talent, no industry. Whatever could have impelled an educated woman, a woman of feeling, to marry such a dolt?' I have never been able to explain it since. Could you possibly have divined an artist in him,—or a man who, though poor, was willing to work and struggle?"

"No. They put all that into my head. To understand my decision you'd have to let me tell you the story of my life, ever since I reached Madrid with my mother. We lived modestly on a small pension that a relation sent us from Paris. I had completed my studies at the Conservatory and was looking for pupils. I had two or three for the piano, and one for English, and these brought me in sufficient for my expenses. It was under these circumstances that my mother fell ill; I lost my pupils because all my time was taken up by caring for her, and soon found myself in a most distressing situation. Then when she died I was left alone in a boarding-house, besieged by men who pestered me at all hours with shameful proposals. I tramped the streets in search of a position as teacher. I was truly in despair. You may well believe that there were days when I was tempted to commit suicide, to plunge into an evil life, to embrace any desperate measure so as to have done with all this brooding. While in this state I read one day in a newspaper

that an English lady staying at the Hotel de Paris desired a young lady companion who had a good knowledge of Spanish and English. I go to the hotel, I wait for the lady and she receives me with open arms and treats me like a sister. You can understand my satisfaction and gratitude. I have never been an ingrate; if at that time my benefactress had asked for my life, I would have surrendered it with pleasure. You may take my word for that. This lady was an enthusiastic student of painting and used to go to the Museo; I accompanied her. Among those who copied at the Museo was a young German, tall, fair, and a friend of my employer. He began to make love to me. He struck me as swell-headed and not very agreeable. When my benefactress noticed that the painter was courting me, she was very much put out and told me that he was a low fellow, a cynical beast; she drew me a most horrible picture of him, depicting him as a depraved egotist. I felt no great sympathy for the German in the first place, so I heeded my protector's words and showed my scorn for the painter quite openly. Despite this, however, Oswald—that was his name—persisted in his attentions. It was at this juncture that Bernardo appeared. I think he knew the German somewhat, and one day he spoke to my employer and me. And now, without my being aware of what was going on, my benefactress began tactics contrary to those she had employed in the case of Oswald. She praised Bernardo to the skies at every least opportunity; she said he was a great artist, a man of superior talents, of ex-

quisite sensibility with a heart of gold; she told me that he adored me. Indeed, I received enchanting love letters from him, filled with delicate sentiments that moved me. My benefactress facilitated our meetings; she urged me to this unfortunate marriage, and as soon as I was wed she left Madrid. Two or three weeks after the ceremony, Bernardo confessed to me with a laugh that all the letters he had written to me had been dictated to him by Fanny."

"Fanny, you say?"

"Yes. Do you know her?"

"I think I do."

"She was in love with Oswald herself. To keep Oswald from courting me she had committed a heartless treachery. After saving me from poverty, she cast me into a situation even worse than what she had rescued me from. She abused the blind confidence I had in her. But I'll have my revenge; yes, I'll have my revenge. Fanny is here with Oswald. I've seen them. I have written to him, making an appointment for tomorrow."

"That was a mistake, Esther."

"Why? Is that the way to play with a person's life?"

"But what will you gain by this?"

"Revenge. Does that seem little?"

"Very little. If you've retained some affection for Oswald, that's a different matter."

"No, not a bit. I don't care for him. But I won't let Fanny get off without punishment for her perfidy."

"And would you go as far as adultery to get your revenge?"

"Who told you that it would go as far as adultery? Besides, in me it would be a right, not a lapse."

"What's more, you'd make Oswald very unhappy."

"Haven't they made me unhappy?"

Esther was in the grip of passionate excitement.

"Do you think Oswald will come to this house tomorrow?" asked Roberto.

"I certainly do."

"This benefactress of yours,—is she tall, thin, with grey eyes?"

"Yes!"

"Then it's my cousin."

"Your cousin?"

"Yes. I warn you, she's a very violent woman."

"I know that."

"She's capable of attacking you anywhere."

"I know that, too."

"Have you considered your resolution calmly? As you will readily understand,—a man to whom a woman writes making an appointment, and to whom she says: 'If I did not respond to your attentions it was because they deceived me about you, and told me that you were many things that you were not,'—such a man cannot resign himself to listening tranquilly to such a confession."

"What is he going to do about it?"

"He will look for satisfaction. No one consents to being the mere, passive instrument of an-

other's vengeance. You will ruin this man's peace of mind."

"Didn't they ruin mine?"

"Yes. But wreaking vengeance for Fanny's treachery on her lover doesn't strike me as just."

"That doesn't matter to me. One thing alone would make me forgo my revenge."

"What?"

"The fact that it might harm you in any way. You have been good to me," murmured Esther, blushing.

"No, you can't harm me in any way. But you could harm yourself. Fanny has a horrible temper."

"Would you care to come here tomorrow?"

"I? Why, what right have I to meddle?"

"Aren't you a friend of mine?"

"Yes."

"Then come."

Roberto did come the following afternoon. Bernardo was, as usual, not at home. Esther was highly excited. Oswald arrived at four. He was a blond young man, with reddish eyes, very tall and long-haired. He seemed to suffer an intense disappointment at finding Roberto alone. They conversed. To Roberto, Oswald appeared to be an insufferable pedant. He took the floor to say, in professorial tones, that he could not endure either the Spaniards or the French. He was going to write a book, entitled *The Anti-Latin,* in which he would consider the Latin peoples as degenerates who should be conquered by the Germans, the sooner the better. He boiled with indignation because folks

spoke of France. France did not exist. France had accomplished nothing. France had erected around itself a Chinese wall. As Björnson had said, a long time before, the world's greatest composer was Wagner; the greatest dramatist, Ibsen; the greatest novelist, Tolstoi; the greatest painter, Böcklin; yet in France they continued to speak of Sardou, Mirbeau, and other similar imbeciles. The original writers of Paris plagiarized Nietzsche; the Latin composers had copied and ransacked the Germans; French science did not exist; France had neither philosophy nor art. France's historic achievement was a complete illusion. The whole Latin race was a matter for scorn.

Roberto made no answer to this diatribe, but scrutinized Oswald closely instead. This huge pedant of a fellow struck him as so absurd. A woman had made an appointment with him and here he was babbling sociology!

Esther came in. The German saluted her very gravely, and asked her in an aside the reason for this appointment. Esther said nothing. Roberto tactfully left the studio and began to stride up and down the corridor.

"Does Fanny know now that you've come here?" asked Esther of Oswald.

"Yes, I think she does."

"I'm glad of that."

"Why?"

"Because then she'll come, too."

"Has she anything to do with this affair?"

"Yes. Has she been living with you for some time?"

"Yes, for some time."

They were both silent for a period, mute in so embarrassing a situation. All at once there came the sound of the bell being tugged violently.

"Here she comes," said Esther, opening the door.

Fanny rushed into the studio. She was pale and upset.

"Weren't you expecting me?" she asked Esther.

"Yes. I knew that you would come."

"What do you want of Oswald?"

"Nothing. I want to tell him what sort of woman you are; I want to inform him about your treachery, that's all. You committed against me, who trusted you as if you were my mother, a vile crime. You betrayed me. You told me that Oswald had seduced a woman and then abandoned her."

"I!" exclaimed the painter, astounded.

"Yes, you. That's what she told me. She told me also that you were an insignificant painter, utterly lacking in talent."

Fanny, stupefied, taken unawares, could not say a word.

"During the time in which you and I were friends," Esther continued, turning to Oswald, "she never missed an opportunity to speak ill of you, to insult you. She said that you were trying to seduce me; she painted you as a wicked wretch, a beast, a repugnant creature. . . ."

"You lie! You lie!" shrieked Fanny in a high-pitched voice.

"I am telling the truth, and only the truth. At that time I believed your advice was for my good, —dictated by the affection you felt for me. Afterward I realized that you had been guilty of the vilest perfidy,—the most iniquitous that can be committed, taking advantage of the influence you wielded over me."

"But you wrote me a letter," interposed Oswald.

"Not I."

"Yes, indeed. A letter in which you replied to my protestations with cruel jests."

"No. I didn't write that letter. Fanny must have forged it. She wanted to keep you away from me at all costs."

"Oh, you have ruined my life!" cried Oswald with wild emphasis, falling into a chair near the table and bowing his head upon his hand. Then he rose from his seat and began to pace from one side of the room to the other.

"This is the truth, the pure truth," affirmed Esther. "And I wanted you to know it, to hear it in her presence, so that she could deny nothing. She made my life unhappy, but she shall not enjoy her perfidy in peace."

"You have ruined my life!" repeated Oswald in his emphatic tone.

"She. It was she."

"I'll kill you!" howled Fanny in a hoarse voice, seizing Esther by the arms.

"But you know now that what she told you

about me was a lie, don't you?" asked Oswald.

"Yes."

"Then, will you listen to me now?"

"Now? Ha, ha!" laughed Fanny. "Now she has a lover."

"Not at all!" cried Esther.

"Yes you have. He comes here every day to see you. He's a blond. You can't deny it."

"Ah! He was in here a moment ago," said Oswald.

"He's not my lover. He's a friend."

"But why did you call Oswald?" queried Fanny in fury. "Do you love him?"

"I? No! But I want to show you that you can't play with other persons' lives as you played with mine. You betrayed me, and now I have had my revenge."

"I'll kill you," howled Fanny again, and she seized Esther by the throat.

"Roberto! Roberto!" cried Esther, terrified.

Roberto burst into the studio, grabbed his cousin by the arm and pulled her violently away from Esther.

"Ah! It's you, Bob?" exclaimed Fanny, immediately growing calm. "You came in the nick of time. I was going to murder her."

Roberto's arrival had the effect of somewhat tranquillizing the company. The four sat down and discussed the matter. They analyzed it as if it were some problem in chess. Fanny loved Oswald. Oswald was in love with Esther, and Esther did not feel the slightest inclination toward the painter.

How were they to adjust the situation? Nobody would yield; besides, as they deliberated they went astray in labyrinths of psychological analysis that led nowhere. It had grown dark; Esther lighted the oil lamp and set it down upon the table. The discussion continued coldly; Oswald spoke in a monotone.

"You be the judge," suggested Fanny to Roberto.

"It seems to me that if everyone will go off on his separate way, each individual conflict will be resolved. But apart from the moral damage you have wrought, Fanny, you have done Esther a very great material injury."

"I'm ready to indemnify her."

"I don't want anything from you," blurted Esther.

"No. Pardon me," went on Roberto. "Pardon me for interfering in this matter. You, Fanny, possess a vast fortune, a lofty position in society; Esther, on the other hand, finds herself, and all through your fault, with her future cut off. She has to earn her living, and you don't know what that means. But I, who do know, know how bitter and sad it is. Esther might have lived a quiet, easy life. Through your fault she has been reduced to her present position."

"I have already said that I'm willing to indemnify her."

"And I've already said that I don't want anything from you."

"No. You ought to let me settle this affair, Esther. May I see you tomorrow, Fanny?"

"I'll wait for you during the whole afternoon."

"Very well. We'll go over this matter."

Fanny rose to leave; she nodded slightly to Esther and held out her hand to her cousin.

"No hard feelings?" asked Roberto.

"No hard feelings," she asserted, giving Roberto's hand a violent shake.

Oswald left in company of Fanny, sinister and humiliated. Esther and Roberto remained alone in the studio.

"Do you know what?" said Roberto, laughing.

"What?"

"You wouldn't have gained very much by marrying Oswald instead of Bernardo. . . . Good-bye, till tomorrow."

"You're forsaking me, Roberto," murmured Esther moodily.

"No. I'll come to see you tomorrow."

"I don't want to remain in this house. Take me away from here, Roberto."

"Doesn't that seem dangerous to you?"

"Dangerous? For whom? You or me?"

"For both, perhaps."

"Oh, not for me. I want so much to leave this place, and never see Bernardo,—never have him bother me."

"He'll never bother you again."

"Take me away from here. Take me anywhere."

"See here, Esther. I'm a man who travels through life over a straight path. That's my sole strength. I wear blinders, just like horses, and I don't go off the road. My two ambitions are to make a fortune and marry a good woman. All the

rest is, to me, merely a delay in the accomplishment of my aims."

"And I belong to . . . all the rest?"

"Yes. For otherwise you'd make me lose my way."

"You're inflexible."

"Yes. But I'm inflexible with myself as well. You're in a difficult position. You married a man a year ago,—a man you didn't love, true enough, but in the belief that he was a loyal, industrious person whom in time you would learn to love. That man has turned out to be a stultified, depraved wretch, utterly lacking in moral fibre. You're deeply wounded in your woman's pride,—the pride of a good, energetic woman. I understand that perfectly. You are looking for a spar to rescue you from the wreckage."

"And you come and say to me, coldly: 'I can't be your rescuer; I have other ambitions. If I come across persons on the way who are suffering agonies because no one understands them, I turn my head the other direction and continue on my way.' "

"That's true. I continue on my way. Would it be better to go ahead and do what any one else would, what a gallant man would, in my place? Take advantage of your plight, get you to become my mistress and then desert you? I have a conscience. Perhaps like my ambitions it is single-tracked. But that's how it's made; there's no help for it."

"There's no salvation; my life is ruined," muttered Esther, her eyes moist.

"Not at all. There's work. Not all men are base and beastly; struggle on, yes, that's what life is! Rather unrest, continual toil and moil, rather the unending alternation of pleasures and griefs than stagnation."

Esther wiped off a tear with her handkerchief.

"Good-bye. I'll try to follow your advice," and she held out her hand.

Roberto took it, and in his cavalier-like fashion bowed and kissed it.

He was on the point of leaving when in the voice of an entreating child she whispered, in anguish:

"Oh! Don't go!"

Roberto returned.

"I'll not lead you astray," cried Esther. "Take me away from here. No. I'll not complain. I'll be a sister to you,—a servant, if you wish. Do with me whatever you will, but don't abandon me. Some one would come along and take advantage of my weakness and it would be so much the worse for me."

"Let us be off, then," murmured Roberto, touched. "Aren't you going to let Bernardo know?"

Esther seized a sheet of letter-paper and wrote, in a large hand: "Don't wait for me. I'm not coming back." Then nervously she put on her hat and joined Roberto, who was waiting at the door.

"But if you don't really want to accompany me, Roberto, please don't do it. Not through any sense of obligation, no," said Esther, her eyes brimming with tears.

"You've said you'll be my sister. Let's be going," he replied, with affection in his voice. Then she fell upon his bosom. Brushing aside the curls from her forehead, he kissed her tenderly.

"No, not like that, not like that," exclaimed Esther, all atremble, and, seizing Roberto by the wrists she offered her lips to his.

Roberto lost his head. He kissed her frantically. Esther encircled his neck with her arms; a deep sigh of desperation and desire sent tremors rippling from her head to her feet.

"Shall we go?"

"Let's go."

They left the house.

A few hours later, Bernardo Santín, with his wife's note in his fingers, was muttering:

"And my poor father? What's going to become of my poor father now?"

## CHAPTER V

General Strike—Gay Times—The Dance at the Frontón—Initiation Into Love

JESÚS'S sister welcomed most enthusiastically the two orphans befriended by the compositor on the day before Christmas; La Salvadora and the tiny tot became at once part of the family.

La Salvadora was of a shy, yet despotic disposition; she was so fond of cleaning, sweeping, dusting and shaking that she provoked Jesús and Manuel. She loved to arrange and put things in order; she was as energetic as she was thin. She brought their meals to Jesús and to Manuel, because they spent too much at the tavern; at noon she would be off for the printing-shop with a basket of food that was bulkier than herself. With the savings of three months La Fea and La Salvadora purchased a new sewing-machine at an instalment house.

"That girl isn't going to let us live in peace," said Jesús.

The typesetter's life had returned to normal. He no longer got drunk. Yet despite the care lavished upon him by his sister and La Salvadora, he became daily more sombre and glum.

One winter's evening when he had received his pay and was leaving the shop, Jesús asked Manuel:

"See here. Aren't you tired of working?"

"Pse!"

"Aren't you bored stiff by this routine, monotonous existence?"

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Anything rather than keep this up!"

"If you were only alone, as I am!"

"La Fea and La Salvadora are on the way to taking care of themselves," said Jesús. In the spring, he added, he and Manuel ought to undertake a hike over the road, working a bit here and there and always seeing new faces and new places. He knew that the Department of the Interior helped out such travellers with a sum that consisted of two reales for every town through which they passed. If they could get such aid they ought to be off at once.

They were crossing the Plaza del Progreso, engrossed in this discussion, when a band of strolling students passed by playing a lilting march. It was beginning to snow; it was very cold.

"Shall we have a good supper tonight? What do you say?" asked Jesús.

"They'll be waiting for us at home."

"Let 'em wait! A day is a day. Are we going to stick there all our lives long, skimping, to save up a few nasty coins? Save! For what?"

They retraced their steps, hurrying along through the Calle de Barrionuevo, and on the Calle de la Paz they entered a tavern and ordered supper. As they ate they discussed their projected journey with

enthusiasm. They drank several toasts to it. Manuel had never been so merry. They were fully agreed, ready to explore the North Pole.

"Now we ought to go to the dance at the Frontón," mumbled Jesús at dessert in a stuttering voice. "We'll pick up a couple of skirts and whoop 'er up for a gay old time! As for the printing-shop,—devil take it."

"That's what," repeated Manuel. "To the dance! And let the lame boss go to hell. Get a move on, you!"

They got up, paid their bill, and as they walked through the Calle de Caretas they entered another tavern for a couple of glasses more.

Stumbling against everybody they reached the Calle de Tetuán, where Jesús insisted that they have two more glasses. They entered another tavern and sat down. The compositor was consumed by a raging thirst: he slouched there, a pallid wreck. Manuel, on the other hand, felt that his blood was on fire and his cheeks darted flames.

"Come on, let's be moving," he said to Jesús. But the typesetter could not stir. Manuel hesitated whether to remain there or leave Jesús sleeping with his head fallen upon the table.

Manuel staggered to the street. The snowflakes, dancing before his eyes, made him dizzy. He reached the Puerta del Sol. At the corner of the Carrera de San Jerónimo he caught sight of a girl who was accosting men. At first he confused her with La Rabanitos, but it was not she.

This girl had a face swollen with erysipelas.

"Hey, what are you doing?" asked Manuel of her, bruskly.

"Can't you see? I'm selling *Heraldos.*"

"And nothing else?"

She lowered her voice, which was hoarse and broken, and added:

"And ready for a good time."

Manuel's heart began to throb violently.

"Haven't you a sweetheart?" he inquired.

"I don't want any steadies."

"Why not?"

"They take away all the money a girl earns and then finish up the job with a good beating. Yes, they do. . . ."

"How much'll you take for coming along with me?"

"Ha! There's a joke for you! Why, you haven't a céntimo!"

"Who said so?"

"I'll bet you haven't."

"I have, too," muttered Manuel boastfully. "Five duros to blow and you're no use to me at all."

"Neither are you to me."

"Listen here," blurted Manuel. Seizing the girl by the arm he gave her a rude shove.

"Hey, you. Quit that, *asaúra!*" she cried.

"I don't feel like it."

"You're nobody, you ain't. And keep your hands where they belong, d'ye hear?"

"If you're willing, I'll treat you to coffee," and Manuel jingled the money in his pocket.

The girl hesitated, then gave the newspapers that she held in her hand to an old woman. She tied her kerchief about her neck and went off with Manuel to a bun shop on the Calle de Jacometrezo. A cinnamon-hued puppy ran after them.

"Is that your dog?"

"Yes."

"What's his name?"

"Sevino."

"And why do you call him that?"

"Because he walked right into our house without anybody bringing him."[1]

They entered the bun shop. It was a spacious place, adorned with columns, at the rear of which was the kitchen, with its huge caldron for making buns. Two gas-lights, the burners of which were surrounded by white globes, shed a sad illumination upon the walls and the square columns, which were covered by white tiles bearing blue designs. Manuel and the girl sat down at a table near a door that led to a back street.

The girl prattled away at a merry clip as she dipped pieces of a bitter coffee-cake into the cup of chocolate. Her name was Petra, but they called her Matilde because that sounded so much better. She was sixteen years old and lived on the Calle del Amparo in an attic. She got up at two; but by the time she arose her mother had already done the house chores. She did not go out till evening. She sold a handful of *Heraldos* and ten *Correos*, and after that . . . whatever turned up. All the

[1] I. e., "He came" (se vino).

money she earned she gave to her mother, and when her mother suspected that she was holding any back, she caught it hot and heavy.

Manuel sipped his glass of whiskey gravely, listened to what she said yet understood hardly a word.

The lass was ugly, in all truth. Her face was caked with powder. To Manuel, after a long scrutiny, it occurred that she looked like a fish smothered in flour, waiting for the frying-pan. As she spoke she made all manner of grimaces and moved her white, bulging eyelids, which fell over her darting eyes.

The girl babbled on about her mother, her brother, an uncle of hers who owned a news-stand and every morning advanced a duro to the kids who sold the *Blanco y Negro,* requiring the children to bring back the duro plus a peseta at the end of the day,—and about a host of other matters.

As she chattered away, Manuel recalled that Jesús had made some mention of a dance, although he could no longer remember just where it was to be held.

"Let's go to that ball," he said.

"Which? Over at the Frontón?"

"Yes."

"Come on."

They left the bun shop. It was still snowing. Proceeding through several deserted by-ways they reached the handball court. The two arc lights at the entrance threw a powerful illumination upon the white street. Manuel bought two tickets; he

checked his cape and she her cloak, and they went in.

The Frontón was a large rectangular area, with one of the longer walls painted a dark blue and marked at regular intervals with white lines and numbers. The other long wall supported the tiers and the boxes.

Two large green screens bounded the shorter walls of the court. Above, at the top of the high roof, amidst the iron framework, ten or twelve glowing arc lamps, free of crystal globes, flashed a dazzling light.

This vast space, painted a dark hue, looked like an unoccupied machine shop.

A number of night birds of very low flight, bedecked with Manila mantles and flowers in their hair, displayed their busts in the boxes. It was cold.

When the military band burst into its noisy music the people from the corridors and from the restaurant came dancing out on to the floor, and in a little while the couples were whirling around the hall. There were no more than half a dozen masks. The dance grew more animated. By the cold, crude light from the arc lamps one could see the couples turning around, all the dancers very solemn, very stiff, as lugubrious as if they were attending a burial.

Some of the men rested their lips against the women's foreheads. But one felt no atmosphere of passionate desire or fever. It was the dance of a people in whom life had been extinguished, of puppets with eyes that bespoke weariness or repressed anger. At times some wag, as if feeling the neces-

sity of proving that this was a carnival ball, would stretch himself out on the floor or let out a piercing yell. There would be a momentary confusion, but soon order was restored and the dancing was resumed.

Manuel was filled with an impulse to do something wild. He got up and began to dance with his girl. She, however, vexed because he could not keep in time, went back to her seat. Disconsolate, Manuel did the same. Couples tripped by before them; the women with daubed faces and darkened eyes, with a beastly expression upon their rouged lips, and the men with an arrogant mien and an aggressive glance.

Angrily the men ripped through the streamers that were thrown down from the boxes, entangling the dancers.

A drunken negro, seated near Manuel, greeted the passing of some good-looking woman with a shout that mimicked a child's voice:

"Olé there! My gipsy baby!"

"Hello, Manolo," came a voice to Manuel's ears. It was Vidal, who was dancing with an elegant mask, tightly clasping her waist.

"Come see me tomorrow," said Vidal.

"Where?"

"Seven at night, at the Café de Lisboa."

"Good."

Vidal was soon lost with his partner in the whirlpool of dancers. The music paused for an intermission.

"Shall we leave?" asked Manuel of the girl.

"Yes, let's be going."

Manuel was all atremble with emotion at thought that the tragic moment was approaching. They went to the check-room, got their clothes and left.

It was still snowing. The light from the electric globes over the door of the Frontón illuminated the street, which was covered with a white sheet of snow. Manuel and the girl crossed the Puerta del Sol in haste, went up the Calle de Correos, turned into the Calle de la Paz and stopped before an open gate which was lighted by the half confidential, half mysterious glow that came from a large, very lugubrious lantern.

They pushed aside a glass door and disappeared up the dark staircase.

## CHAPTER VI

The Snow—More Tales From Don Alonso—*Las Injurias*—The *Asilo del Sur*

MANUEL slept like a log the whole of the following morning. Indeed, when he got up it was past three in the afternoon.

He knocked at Jesús's door. La Fea was at the machine and La Salvadora was sitting in a tiny chair ripping some skirts; the tot was playing on the floor.

"Where's Jesús?" asked Manuel.

"I guess you know better than we do," retorted La Salvadora, her voice quivering with anger.

"I . . . left him . . . ; then I met a friend. . . ." Manuel forced himself to invent a lie. "Perhaps he's at the shop," he added.

"No. He's not at the printing shop," replied La Salvadora.

"I'll go look for him."

Manuel left the hostelry of Santa Casilda in shame. He walked toward the heart of the city and asked for his friend at the tavern on the Calle de Tetuán.

"He was here," answered the waiter, "until the place closed. Then he went off as drunk as a lord, I don't know where."

Manuel returned to the house, and went back to

bed with the intention of going to the printing shop on the next day. But the following day he awoke late again. He was overcome by an inertia that seemed impossible to conquer.

He came upon La Salvadora in the corridor.

"Haven't you gone to the shop today, either?" she asked.

"No."

"Very well, then. Don't trouble yourself ever to come back here again," rasped the girl, furiously. "We don't need any tramps. While we're here slaving away, you fellows go out for a gay time. I'm telling you, now, don't ever show up here again, and if you see Jesús, tell him the same for his sister and for me."

Manuel shrugged his shoulders and left the house. It had been snowing all day. In the Puerta del Sol gangs of street-sweepers and hose men were clearing away the drifts; the filthy water ran along the gutters.

Several times Manuel stepped into the Café de Lisboa, hoping to come upon Vidal. Not finding him there he had a bite at a tavern, after which he went for a stroll through the streets. It got dark very early. Madrid, enveloped in snow, was deserted. The Plaza de Oriente looked unreal, somewhat like a scene set upon a stage. The monarchs of stone wore white cloaks. The statue in the centre of the square stood out nobly against the sky of grey. From the Viaduct there was a view of white expanses. Toward Madrid lay a heap of yellowish structures and black roofs, of towers jut-

ting into the milky heavens, reddened by a luminous irradiation.

Manuel returned to the house in low spirits; he threw himself into bed.

"Tomorrow I'm going back to the shop," he said to himself. But on the morrow he did not go back. He rose very early with that intention, and was actually about to enter the printery when the idea occurred to him that the boss might raise a rumpus, so he turned away. "If not here, then I'll find work elsewhere," he thought, and he turned his steps back in the direction of the Puerta del Sol, proceeding thence to the Plaza de Oriente, through the Calle de Bailén, and the Calle de Ferraz to the Paseo de Rosales. The avenue was silent and deserted.

From this point could be viewed the entire landscape white under the snow, the dark groves of the Casa de Campo, and the round hills bristling with black pine trees. The pallid sun hovered in a leaden sky. Near the horizon, in the direction of Villaverde, shone a strip of clear blue sky in a pink mist. Profound silence everywhere. Only the strident whistle of the locomotives and the hammering in the workshops of the Estación del Norte disturbed that calm. Not a footfall resounded on the pavement.

The houses along the avenue displayed snowy adornments upon balustrade and coping; the trees seemed to flatten under that white mantle.

That afternoon Manuel returned toward the

printing-shop, ventured inside and asked the pressman for Jesús.

"He got a fierce call-down from the boss," was the answer.

"Did he fire him?"

"Maybe not! Go up now and take *your* medicine."

Manuel, about to go up, paused.

"Has Jesús gone already?"

"Yes. He must be in the corner tavern."

And he really was. He sat before a table drinking a glass of whisky. There was a sad, doleful expression upon his face. He was a prey to his sombre thoughts.

"What are you doing?" asked Manuel.

"Oh, it's you, is it?"

"Yes. Did the old cripple discharge you?"

"Yes."

"Were you thinking of anything?"

"Pse! . . . There's nothing doing, anyway. Come on, let's have a glass or two."

"No, not for me."

"You'll do as you're told. I've got only forty céntimos, which is as good as nothing. Hey, waiter! A couple of glasses."

They drank and then walked off in the direction of the Santa Casilda hostelry. It was still snowing. Jesús, his cheeks hectic, coughed desperately.

"I warn you: Salvadora, that little kid, will raise holy hell," said Manuel. "Such a temper she has!"

"Well, what do they want? To have us saving

up money all our lives? I'm glad that the kid is in the house, for she can take care of La Fea, who is the unhappier of the two. . . . And you,—how much have you got left from your pay?" asked the compositor of Manuel.

"Me? Not even a button."

At this reply Jesús was so deeply moved that he seized his companion by the arm and assured him in the most ardent outbursts that he esteemed him and loved him as a brother.

"And may I be damned!" he concluded, "if I'm not willing to do anything under the sun for you. For this telling me that you haven't even a button is worth more to me than all the deeds of the hero of Cascorro." [1]

Manuel, affected by these words, asseverated in a husky voice that though he was a vagabond and a good-for-nothing, he was ready to perform any sacrifice for so staunch a friend.

In order to celebrate such tender protestations of amity, they both lurched into a tavern on the Calle de Barrionuevo and gulped down a few more glasses of whisky.

They reached the Santa Casilda hostelry dead drunk. The house janitor came out to meet them, demanding of each the rent for his room. Jesús answered jestingly that they gave him no money because they had none to give. He rejoined that either they paid or they could take to the street,

[1] Jesús here refers to the town of Cascorro, in the province of Camagüey, Cuba, where, in 1896, the Spanish soldier Eloy Gonzalo distinguished himself for heroism.—*Tr.*

whereupon the compositor dared him to throw them out.

The man's wife, who might have been a soldier, took them both by the shoulder and shoved them into the street.

"Lord, oh Lord! The weaker sex!" mumbled Jesús. "That's what they call the weaker sex! . . . And they can throw a fellow out of the house. . . . And where's a guy going to get two duros? . . . Well, what do you say to that, Manuel? Hey? The weaker sex. . . . How do you like such a figurative manner of speech? . . . It's we who are the weaker, and they simply abuse their strength."

They began to stagger along the street; neither felt the cold.

From time to time Jesús would pause and deliver a diatribe; a man would laugh as they passed by, or a youngster, from some doorway, would call after them and send a snowball in their direction.

"I wonder whom they're laughing at?" thought Manuel.

The Ronda was silent, white, cut by a dark stream of water left by the carts. The large flakes came falling down, interweaving in their descent; they danced in the gusts of wind like white butterflies. During the intervals of calm they would glide slowly, softly through the greyish atmosphere, like the gentle down from the neck of a swan.

Afar, in the mist, lay the white landscape of the suburbs, the gently curving slopes, the houses and the cemeteries of the Campo de San Isidro. Against this background everything stood out more distinct

than ordinarily: the roofs, the mudwalls, the trees, the lanterns thickly hooded in snow.

In this whitish ambient the black smoke belched forth by the chimneys spread through the air like a threat.

"The weaker sex. Hey, Manuel?" continued Jesús, harping upon his fixed idea. "And yet they can show a fellow to the door. . . . It's as if they said the weak snow. . . . Because you tread upon it. . . . Isn't that so? . . . But the snow makes you cold. . . . And then who's the weaker, you or the snow? . . . You, because you catch cold. That's all a fellow does in this world,—catch cold. . . . Everything is cold, understand? . . . Everything. . . . Like the snow. . . . Do you see how white it is, eh? It looks so good, so affectionate . . . the weaker sex. . . . Well, touch it, and you freeze."

They squandered their last céntimos on another glass of whisky, and from that moment they were no longer conscious of their doings.

. . . . . .

The following morning they awoke frozen through and through, in a shed of the Cattle Market situated near the Paseo de los Pontones.

Jesús was coughing horribly.

"You stay here," said Manuel to him. "I'm going to see whether I can pick up something to eat."

He went out to the Ronda. The snow had ceased. Several gamins were amusing themselves by throwing snowballs at one another. He went up the Calle del Águila; the cobbler's was closed. It

then occurred to Manuel to hunt out Jacob; he turned toward the Viaduct and was walking along absent-mindedly when he felt some one grab him by the shoulders and cry:

"Stay thy hand, Abraham. Where are you bound?"

It was the Snake-Man, the illustrious Don Alonso.

Manuel told him what straits he and Jesús were in.

"Don't give up; better times are coming," mumbled the Snake-Man. "Have you any place to go to?"

"A shed."

"Good. Let's go there. I've got a peseta. That's enough to get the three of us a bite."

They went into a chop house on the Calle del Águila where, for two reales, they received a pot of stew; they bought bread and then the pair made quickly for the shed. They ate, laid aside something for the night, and after their meal Don Alonso tore loose several pickets from a fence and succeeded in starting a fire inside the shed.

That afternoon it began to rain in torrents; the Snake-Man considered it his duty to enliven the company, so he told one tale after the other, always commencing with his eternal refrain of "Once in America. . . ."

"Once in America"—(and this is the least unlikely tale of all he told)—"we were sailing down the Mississippi on a steamer. And let me tell you, those steamboats rock so little that you can

play billiards on them. Well, we were sailing along and we reach a certain town. The boat stops and we see a mob of people on the wharf of that village. We draw nearer and we behold that they're all Indians, with the exception of a few guards and Yankee soldiers.

"I" (and Don Alonso added this information proudly) "who was the director, said to my musicians, 'We must start a lively tune,' and right away, Boom! Boom! Tra, la, la! . . . You can't imagine the shouts and the shrieks and the croaking of that crowd.

"When the band had stopped playing, a big fat Indian squaw with her head full of cock feathers steps up to me and begins to make ceremonial greetings. I asked one of the Yankees, 'Who is this lady?' 'She's the queen,' he said, 'and she wants a little more music.' I saluted the queen. Most excellent lady! (And I made an elegant series of Versaillesque bows, setting one foot back.) I said to the members of the band, 'Boys, a little more music for her Majesty.' They started up again, and the queen, highly pleased, saluted me with her hand on her heart. I did the same. Most excellent lady!

"We put up our portable circus in a few hours and I withdrew to ponder over the programme. I was the director. 'We'll have to give The Mounted Indian,' I said to myself. Even though it's a discredited number in the cities, they can't know it here. Then I'll exhibit my ecuyères, acrobats, equilibrists, pantomimists and, as a finale, the clowns, who will be

the climax of the show. The fellow who was to play The Mounted Indian I tipped off and said, 'See here, make yourself up to look as much like our audience as possible.' 'Don't worry about that, director,' he answered. Boys! It was a sensational success. When the 'Indian' appeared, what a racket of applause!"

Don Alonso mimed the number; he crouched, imitating the movements of one about to mount a horse; he sank his head in his chest, staring at a fixed point and imitated the whirling of a lasso above his head.

"The Mounted Indian," continued Don Alonso, "won the applause of the other Indians. I'm positive that not one of them knew how to ride a horse. Then there was an acrobatic number, followed by a variety of others, until the time for the clowns came around. 'Here's where there's pandemonium,' I thought to myself. And surely enough, all they had to do was appear when a wild tumult broke loose. 'They're having a wonderful time,' I said to myself, when in comes a boy. 'Director, Señor Director!' 'What's the trouble?' 'The whole audience is leaving.' 'Leaving?' And indeed, they were. The Indians had become scared at sight of the clowns, and imagined that they were evil spirits come there to spoil the performance for them. I jump into the ring, and send the clowns stumbling off. Then, to efface the bad impression, I performed several sleight-of-hand tricks. When I began to belch ribbons of flame from my mouth, Lord, what a triumph! The whole house was as-

tounded. But when I palmed a couple of rings and then drew out of my coat pocket a fish-bowl filled with live fishes, I received the greatest ovation of my career."

Don Alonso was silent. Jesús and Manuel prepared to go to sleep, stretched out on the ground, huddled into a corner. The rain came down in bucketfuls; the water drummed loudly upon the roof of the shed; the wind whistled and moaned from afar.

It began to thunder, and it was for all the world as if some train were crashing headlong down a metal slope, so continuous, so violent was the thundering.

"A fine tempest!" grunted Jesús.

"Bah! Tempests on land!" sniffed Don Alonso. "Cheap stuff! Tempests on land are mere imitations. At sea,—that's where you want to witness a tempest, at sea! when the waves come sweeping over the masts. . . . Even on the lakes. On Lake Erie and Lake Michigan I've been through tremendous storms, with waves as high as houses. But I must admit that the wind goes down almost at once and in a little while the water is as smooth as the pond of the Retiro. Why, once yonder in America. . . ."

But Manuel and Jesús, weary of American tales, pretended to be fast asleep and the former Snake-Man sank into disconsolate silence, thinking of the days when he palmed the Indians' rings and drew forth fish-bowls.

They could not sleep; several times they had to

get up and change their places, for the water leaked through the roof.

On the following morning, when they left their hole, it was no longer raining. The snow had been melted completely. The Cattle Market was transformed into a swamp; the pavement of the Ronda, into a sea of mud; the houses and the trees dripped water; everything was black, miry, abandoned; only a few wandering, famished, mud-stained dogs were sniffing about in the heaps of refuse.

Manuel pawned his cape and on the advice of Jesús protected his chest with several layers of newspaper. For his cape he was allowed ten reales at a pawnbroker's, and the three went off to eat at the Shelter of the Montaña del Príncipe Pío.

Manuel and Jesús, accompanied by Don Alonso, went into two printing shops and inquired after work, but there was none. At night they went back to the shelter for supper. Don Alonso suggested that they go to the beggars' Depósito. Thither the three wended their way; it was dusk; before the doors of the Depósito there was a long row of tattered ragamuffins, waiting for them to open; Jesús and Manuel were opposed to going in.

They walked through the little wood near the Montaña barracks; some soldiers and prostitutes were chatting and smoking in a group. They went along the Calle de Ferraz, then along Bailén; they crossed the Viaduct, and going through the Calle de Toledo, reached the Paseo de los Pontones.

The corner of the shed where they had spent the

previous night was now occupied by a crew of young vagabonds.

They resumed their trudging through the mud; it began to rain anew. Manuel proposed that they go to La Blasa's tavern, and by the staircase of the Paseo Imperial they descended to the quarters of Las Injurias. The tavern was closed. They walked down a lane. Their feet sank into mud and pools of water. They noticed a hovel with an open door; they went inside. The Snake-Man struck a match. The place had two rooms, each a couple of metres square. The walls of the dingy dens oozed dampness and slime; the floor, of tamped earth, was riddled with the constant dripping and covered with puddles. The kitchen was a cess-pool of pestilence; in the centre rose a mound of refuse and excrement; in the corners, dead, desiccated cockroaches.

The next morning they left the house. It was a damp, dreary day; afar, the fields lay wrapped in mist. Las Injurias district was depopulated; its denizens were on their way through the muddy lanes to Madrid, on the hunt. Some ascended to the Paseo Imperial, others trooped down though the Arroyo de Embajadores.

They were a repulsive rout; some, ragpickers; others, mendicants; still others, starvelings; almost all of them of nauseating mien. Worse in appearance than the men were the women,—filthy, dishevelled, tattered. This was human refuse, enfolded in rags, swollen with cold and dankness, vomited up by this pest-ridden quarter. Here was a

medley of skin-diseases, marks left by all the ailments to which the flesh is heir, the jaundiced hue of tertian fever, the contracted eyelash,—all the various stigmata of illness and poverty.

"If the rich could only see this, eh?" asked Don Alonso.

"Bah! They'd do nothing," muttered Jesús.

"Why not?"

"Because they wouldn't. If you were to deprive the rich man of the satisfaction of knowing that while he sleeps another is freezing, and that while he eats another is dying of hunger, you would deprive him of half his pleasure and good fortune."

"Do you really believe that?" asked Don Alonso, staring in astonishment at Jesús.

"I certainly do. What's more,—why should we bother with what they may think? They don't give themselves any concern over us. At this hour they must be sleeping in their clean, soft beds, so peacefully, while we. . . ."

The Snake-Man made a gesture of displeasure; he was vexed that any one should speak ill of the rich.

The sun came out: a disk of red over the black earth. Then carts began to arrive at the Gas Work's dumping grounds and to dump rubbish and refuse. Here and there in the doorways of the hovels that filled the hollow appeared a woman with a cigar in her mouth.

One night the watchman of Las Iniurias discovered the three men in the abandoned shanty and ejected them.

The following days, Manuel and Jesús—the

showman had disappeared—decided to go to the Asilo de las Delicias for the night. Neither was at all bent upon finding work. It was already almost a month since they had taken to this tramp's existence, and between one day at a barracks and the next in a monastery or a shelter, they managed to keep going.

The first time that Jesús and Manuel slept in the Asilo de las Delicias was a March day.

When they reached the Asilo it had not yet opened. They passed their wait strolling along the old Yeseros road. They wandered into the fields nearby, where they saw wretched shacks in the doorways of which some men were playing at *chito* or *tejo,* while bands of ragged children swarmed about.

These by-roads were gloomy, bleak, desolate spots,—the abode of ruins, as if a city had been reared there and been annihilated by a cataclysm. On all sides were heaps of refuse and débris, gullies filled with rubbish; here and there a broken stone chimney, a shattered lime-kiln. Only at rare intervals might one catch a glimpse of a garden with its draw-well; in the distance, on the hills that bounded the horizon, rose the dim suburbs and scattered houses. It was a disquieting vicinity; behind the hillock one came suddenly upon evil-looking vagabonds in groups of three or four.

Through a little gorge nearby flowed the Abroñigal, a rivulet; Manuel and Jesús followed it until they reached a stone bridge called Tres Ojos.

They returned at night. The shelter was already open. It was on the right hand side of the Yeseros road, in the vicinity of a number of abandoned cemeteries. Its pointed roof, its galleries and wooden staircases, lent it the appearance of a Swiss châlet. On the balcony was a signboard attached to the balustrade, reading: "Asilo Municipal del Sur." A lantern with a red glass shed its gory light upon the deserted fields.

Manuel and Jesús went down several steps; at a counter a clerk who was scribbling away in a big book asked them their names; they replied and then entered the institution. The section for men consisted of two large rooms lit by gas-burners, separated by a partition wall; each had wooden pillars and high, tiny windows. Jesús and Manuel crossed the first room and went into the second, where there were several men stretched out here and there upon the beds. They, too, lay down and chatted for a while. . . .

As they spoke, a number of beggars kept coming in, taking possession of the beds that were placed in the middle of the room and near the pillars. These new arrivals dropped on to the floor their coats, their patched capes, their filthy undershirts,—a heap of tatters,—at the same time depositing tin cans filled with cigarette ends, pots and baskets.

Almost all the patrons of the place went into the second room.

"There isn't such a draught in this room," said an old beggar who was preparing to lie down near Manuel.

Several ragamuffins between fifteen and twenty years of age burst into the place, took possession of a corner and settled down to a game of *cané*.

"You bunch of rascals!" cried the old beggar near Manuel. "You had to choose this place to come and gamble in. Damn it!"

"Wow! Listen to what old Wrinkle-face is bawling about now!" retorted one of the gamins.

"Shut your mouth, Old Bore! You're as bad as Don Nicanor pounding his drum," jeered another.

"Tramps! Vagabonds!" growled the old fellow angrily.

Manuel turned toward the fuming old man. He was a diminutive creature, with a sparse, greyish beard; he had a pair of eyes that looked like scars and black spectacles that reached to the middle of his forehead. He wore a patched, grimy coat; a flat, woolen cap, on top of which sat a derby with a greasy brim. As he had entered, he had disburdened himself of a canvas bag which he dropped to the floor.

"It's these whippersnappers that get us in wrong," explained the old man. "Last year they robbed the shelter telephone and stole a piece of lead from a water-pipe."

Manuel swept the room with his glance. Near him, a tall old fellow with a white beard and the features of an apostle, leaned his shoulder against one of the pillars, immersed in his thoughts; he wore a smock, a muffler and a cap. In the corner occupied by the impudent, blustering ragamuffins rose the silhouette of a man garbed in black,—the type

of a retired official. On his knees reposed the head of a slumbering boy of five or six.

All the rest were of bestial appearance; beggars that looked like highwaymen; maimed and crippled who roamed the streets exhibiting their deformities; unemployed labourers, now innured to idleness, amongst whom was an occasional specimen of a ruined gentleman, with straggling beard and greasy locks, whose bearing and apparel,—collar, cravat and cuffs, filthy as they might be,—still recalled a certain distinction,—a pallid reflection of the splendour that once had been.

The air in the room very soon grew hot, and the atmosphere, saturated with the odour of tobacco and poverty, became nauseating.

Manuel lay back in his cot and listened to the conversation that had sprung up between Jesús and the old man with the black spectacles. The fellow was an inveterate beggar, a connoisseur in all the arts of exploiting official charity.

Despite his continuous wanderings hither and thither, he had never been more than five or six leagues away from Madrid.

"Once upon a time this shelter was a good place," he explained to Jesús. "There was a stove; each cot had its woollen blanket, and in the morning everybody got a good plate of soup."

"Yes, water soup," sneered another beggar, a young, thin, long-haired lad whose cheeks were browned by the sun.

"Even so. It warmed a fellow's innards."

The man of refinement, doubtless disgusted to

find himself amid this rout of ragamuffins, took the sleeping child in his arms and drew near to the place occupied by Manuel and Jesús. He joined the conversation and began to relate his tribulations. Sad as his story was, there was yet something comical about it.

He came from a provincial capital, having left a modest position and believed in the words of the district deputy, who promised him a situation in the offices of the Ministry. For two months he tagged at the heels of the deputy; at the end of this time he found himself face to face with the direst poverty, absolutely without influence or recourse. In the meantime he was writing to his wife, inspiring her with hope.

The previous day he had been thrown out of his boarding-house and after having tramped over half of Madrid without finding a way to earn a peseta, had gone to the authorities and asked for an officer to conduct him and his child to some shelter. "I take only beggars to the shelter," was the guard's reply. "I'm going out begging," answered the man humbly, "so you can take me." "No," was the officer's answer. "First you must actually beg, then I'll arrest you."

The officer was intractable. At this moment a man happened to be going by. The father approached him with his child, brought his hand to his hat, but the request could not issue from his lips. It was then that the guard advised him to go to the Asilo de las Delicias.

"If they'd arrested you, you'd have gained noth-

ing by it," said the fellow with the black spectacles. "They'd have taken you off to the Cerro del Pimiento, and you'd have spent the livelong day there without so much as a crumb."

"And then what would they have done with me?" asked the gentleman of refinement.

"Expel you from Madrid."

"But aren't there places here where a person can spend the night?" asked Jesús.

"A raft of them," replied the old man. "Everywhere you go. Especially now, when it's so cold in the winter."

"I've lived," chimed in the young beggar, "for more than half a year in Vaciamadrid,—an almost depopulated town. A comrade of mine and myself found a house that was closed, and we installed ourselves in it. For a few weeks we lived swimmingly. At night we'd go to the Arganda station; we'd bore a hole with an auger in a cask of wine, fill up our wine-bag and then stuff the hole with pitch."

"And why did you leave the place?" queried Manuel.

"The civil guard laid siege to us and we were forced to escape through the windows. I'll be damned if I wasn't already tired of the joint. I like to roam along the road, one day here, another there. That's the way a fellow meets people who know a thing or two, and picks up an education. . . ."

"Have you done much tramping hereabouts?"

"All my life. I can't use up more than one pair of sandals per town. If I stay very long in the same place I grow so uneasy that I just have to get

a move on. Ah! The country! There's nothing like it. You eat where you can. In winter it's tough. But summer time! You make your thyme bed underneath a tree and have a magnificent sleep, better than the king himself. When the cold comes around, then, like the swallows, off you fly to wherever it's nice and warm."

The old man with the black spectacles, scornful of what the young vagabond had said, informed Jesús as to the nooks to be found in the outlying districts.

"Now let me tell you where I go when it's fine weather. There's a cemetery near the third Depósito. There are some houses there that we'll go to this spring."

The conclusion of the conversation reached Manuel in but a confused form, as he had fallen asleep. At midnight he was awakened by some voices. In the corner to which the ragamuffins had repaired two boys were rolling over the floor in a hand to hand struggle.

"I'll pay you," muttered one between his teeth.

"Let go. You're choking me."

The old mendicant, who had been awakened, got up in a fury and, seizing his stick, let it fall hard upon the shoulder of one of the boys. The youth who was struck down rose up, roaring with anger.

"Come on, now, you pig! You son of a dirty bitch!" he shrieked.

They rushed for each other, exchanged several blows and then both fell headlong to the floor.

"These young tramps are getting us in wrong," exclaimed the old man.

A guard re-established order and expelled the trouble-makers. The denizens of the shelter were again calm and nothing more was heard save the muffled or sibilant snoring of the sleepers. . . .

The next morning, even before daybreak, when the doors of the Asilo were opened, every one who had spent the night there left the place and had in a moment disappeared into the outskirts.

Manuel and Jesús chose the Calle de Mendez Alvaro. On the platforms of the Estación del Mediodía the electric arcs shone like globes of light in the gloomy atmosphere of the night.

From the chimneys of the roundhouse rose dense pillars of white smoke; the red and green pupils of the signal lamps winked confidentially from their lofty poles; the straining boilers of the locomotives sent forth most horrible roars.

On both sides along the perspective of the thoroughfare quivered the pale lights of the distant street lamps. Yonder in the country, through the air that was as murky and yellowish as ground glass, could be made out upon the colourless fields, low cottages, black picket fences, high gnarled telegraph poles, distant, obscure embankments that formed the railroad bed. A few ramshackle taverns, lighted by a languidly burning oil lamp, were open. . . . With the opaque glow of dawn appeared, to the right, the wide, leaden roof of the Estación del Mediodía, glistening with dew; op-

posite, the pile of the General Hospital, jaundice-hued; to the left, the barren fields, the indistinct brown vegetable patches that rose until they blended, with the undulating hills of the horizon under the grey, humid sky, into the vast desolation of the Madrilenian suburbs. . . .

## CHAPTER VII

### The Black House—Conflagration—Flight

NEAR the station stretched a line of carriages; the cabmen had lighted a fire. Here Jesús and Manuel warmed themselves for a moment.

"We'll have to go to that town," muttered Jesús.

"Which?"

"That uninhabited place the fellow was telling us about. Vaciamadrid."

"I'm ready."

A train had just pulled into the station, so Manuel and Jesús took up a position at the entrance, where the passengers were coming out; they hoped to earn a few coins by carrying some valise.

Manuel was lucky enough to lug a gentleman's bundle to a carriage, for which service he received a modest fee.

Manuel and Jesús proceeded now to the Prado. They were passing the Museo when they beheld a hackman whipping up his horses, and, behind the carriage, running with all his might, Don Alonso, dressed in a suit that seemed nothing but rents and tatters.

"Hey, there!" shouted Manuel to him.

Don Alonso turned around, came to a stop and walked back to Jesús and Manuel.

"Where were you bound in such a hurry?" they asked him.

"I was after that carriage, to carry up the gentleman's trunk for him. But I'm exhausted. My legs are caving in."

"And what are you doing?" asked Manuel.

"Pse! . . . Starving to death."

"Better times haven't come yet?"

"Will they ever come? Napoleon met his finish at Waterloo, didn't he? Well, my life is one continuous Waterloo."

"What are you doing now?"

"I've been selling smutty books. I ought to have one here," he added, showing Manuel a pamphlet, the title of which read: "The Wiles of Women on The First Night."

"Is that a good one?" asked Manuel.

"Oh, so so. Let me warn you beforehand that you're supposed to read only every other line. To think of me, fallen to such things! I, who have been director of a circus in *Niu Yoc!*"

"Better times are coming."

"A few nights ago I went out staggering, famished, and made my way to an Emergency Hospital. 'What's the matter with you?' I was asked by an attendant. 'Hunger.' 'That's not a disease,' he replied. Then I went begging and now I go every night to the Salamanca quarter, and I tell passing women that a little boy of mine has just died and that I need a few reales with which to purchase

candles. They are horrified and usually come across with something. I've also found a place to sleep. It's over yonder by the river."

The trio ate their next meal at the María Cristina barracks, and in the afternoon the Snake-Man left for his centre of operations in the Salamanca quarter.

"I've made a peseta and a half today," he said to Manuel and Jesús. "Let's go for supper."

They supped at the Barcelona hostelry, on the Calle del Caballero de Gracia, and spent whatever was left on whisky.

Thereupon they repaired to the spot that had been discovered by Don Alonso,—a tumbledown dwelling near the Toledo bridge. They christened it the Black House. Nothing was left of it save the four walls, which had been levelled to the height of the first story.

It stood in the centre of an orchard; for roof it had a wattle over which projected a number of beams as black and straight as smokestacks.

The three entered the ruin. They crossed the patio, leaping over débris, tiles, rotten wood and mounds of ordure. They made their way through a corridor. Don Alonso struck a match, holding it lighted in the hollow of his palms. Some gipsy families and several beggars dwelt here in secret. Some had made their beds of rags and straw; others were asleep, leaning against matweed ropes that were fastened to the wall.

Don Alonso had his special corner, to which he took Manuel and Jesús.

The floor was damp, earthen; a few of the house walls were still standing; the holes in the roof were plugged with bunches of cane that had been gathered by the river, and with pieces of matting.

"Deuce take it all!" exclaimed Don Alonso as he stretched himself out. "A fellow has always got to be on the lookout for a place. If I could only be a snail!"

"Why a snail?" queried Jesús.

"If only to get out of paying bills for lodgings."

"Better times are coming," promised Manuel, ironically.

"That's the only hope," replied the Snake-Man. "By tomorrow our luck may have shifted. You don't know life. Fate is to man what the wind is to the weathervane."

"The trouble is," grumbled Jesús, "that our weathervane, when it isn't pointing to hunger, is pointing to cold and always to poverty and wretchedness."

"Things may change tomorrow."

The trio fell asleep in the lap of these flattering illusions. Manuel awoke at daybreak; the light of the dawn filtered in through the spaces of the wattle that served as roof, and with this pale glow the interior of the Black House assumed a sinister aspect.

They slept in a bunch, rolled up in a ball of rags and newspaper sheets. Some of the men sought out the women in the semi-gloom, and their grunts of pleasure could be heard.

Near Manuel a woman whose features betrayed

idiocy as well as physical degeneration, begrimed and garbed in patches, was cradling a child in her arms. She was a beggar, still young,—one of those poor wandering creatures who roam over the road without direction or goal, at the mercy of fate.

The opening of her dirty waist revealed a flat, blackish bosom. One of the gipsy youths glided over to her and seized her by the breast. She laid the infant to one side and stretched herself out on the floor. . . .

Just before the dawn of one April day the cold was so terrible inside the Black House that they made a fire. The flames leaped high, and at the moment least expected the wattle roof blazed up. At once the fire spread. As the canes burned they burst with an explosion. Soon a vast flame had risen into the air.

The denizens escaped in terror. Manuel, Jesús and Don Alonso made their way quickly through the Paseo de los Pontones to the Ronda.

The blazing roof shone through the dark night like a gigantic torch. Soon, however, it was extinguished, and only sparks were left, leaping and flying through the air.

The three walked along the Ronda. Yonder they could see the long lines of gas lanterns, and at intervals, luminous points like shining islands dotting the obscurity. On the solitary Ronda could be heard, very rarely, the hastening footsteps of some passerby and the distant barking of the dogs.

It occurred to Manuel to go to La Blasa's tavern.

Instead of taking the Paseo Imperial, they entered Las Injurias through a lane lit up by oil lamps and skirting the Gas House.

Black and red smoke rose from the lofty chimneys. The round paunches of the tanks were down near the ground, and around them rose the girders, which, in the darkness, produced an eerie effect.

La Blasa's tavern was not open. Shivering with the cold they proceeded along the Ronda. They passed a factory whose windows filled the gloom of the night with the violent brilliance of arc lights.

In the midst of this silence the factory seemed to roar, belching clouds of smoke through the chimney.

"There shouldn't be any factories," burst out Jesús with sudden indignation.

"And why not?" asked Don Alonso.

"Because there shouldn't."

"And how are people going to live? What's going to become of business if there aren't any factories?"

"Let it suffer, as we're suffering. The earth ought to provide enough for all of us to live on," added Jesús.

"And how about civilization?"

"Civilization! Much good civilization does us. Civilization is all very good for the rich. But what does it mean to the poor? . . ."

"And electric light? And steamships? And the telegraph?"

"Yes, what about them? Do you use them?"

"No. But I *have* used them."

"When you had money. Civilization is made for

the fellow with money, and whoever hasn't the hard cash,—let him starve. Formerly, the rich man and the poor got their light alike from the same sort of lamp; today the poor man continues with his humble lamp and the rich man lights his house with electricity; before, if the poor man went on foot, the rich man went on horseback; today the poor man continues to go on foot, and the rich man rides in an automobile; before, the rich man had to dwell among the poor; today, he lives apart; he's raised a wall of cotton and can hear nothing. Let the poor howl; he can't hear. Let them die of hunger; he'll never learn of it. . . .

"You're wrong," protested Don Alonso.

"Hardly. . . ."

The distant barking of the dogs could still be heard. It was getting colder with every moment. They walked through the Rondas of Valencia and Atocha.

The solemn mass of a General Hospital, its windows illumined by pallid lights, rose before them.

"Inside there, at least, a fellow isn't cold," murmured the Snake-Man in a jovial tone that echoed like a painful plaint.

It was beginning to grow light; the grey mists of morning were scattering. Over the road some ox-carts came creaking. Far off the hens were cackling. . . .

## CHAPTER VIII

The Municipal Dungeons—The Returned Soldier—The Convent Soup

SEVERAL times Manuel, Jesús and Don Alonso slept in churches. One night, after the trio had retired in a chapel of San Sebastian, crowded with benches, the sexton threw them out and handed them over to a couple of officers. Don Alonso tried to show the guards that he was not only a respectable person, but an important one as well. While he was thus engaged in argument, Jesús escaped by the Plaza de Santa Ana.

"You can tell all that to the court," answered the guard to the Snake-Man's protestations.

They made their way through a nearby street and entered by a gate before which burned a red lamp. They climbed a narrow stairway into a room where two clerks sat scribbling. The clerks ordered Don Alonso and Manuel to be seated upon a bench, which both made haste to do most humbly.

"You, the older, what's your name?" asked one of the clerks.

"I?" said the Snake-Man.

"Yes, you. Are you deaf, or an idiot?"

"No. No, sir."

"Well, you look it. What's your name?"

"Alonso de Guzmán Calderón y Téllez."

"Age?"

"Fifty-six."

"Married or single?"

"Bachelor."

"Profession?"

"Circus artist."

"Where do you live?"

"Up to a few days ago. . . ."

"Where do you live now, I'm asking you, you imbecile."

"Why, at present. . . ."

"Write 'without fixed residence,'" suggested the other clerk.

They then registered Manuel, whereupon he and the older man returned to their benches without a word, deeply speculative upon the fate that awaited them.

Officials of the department strolled around the room, chatting; now and then would be heard the tinkling of a bell.

Soon the door opened and a young woman came in with a mantilla over her shoulders. Her eyes were filled with great agitation.

She went over to the two clerks.

"Can you send somebody over . . . to my house. . . . A physician . . . ? My mother just fell and broke her head."

The clerk blew out a puff from his cigar and made no reply. Then, turning about so as to face the woman, and staring at her from crown to toe, he answered with an epical coarseness and bestiality:

"That belongs to the Emergency Hospital. We've got nothing to do with such cases." He turned away and continued to smoke. The woman's eyes roved in fright through the room; she finally decided to leave, mumbled good night in a breathless voice to which nobody replied, and disappeared.

"The ink-spilling pettifoggers! The beasts!" muttered Don Alonso in a low voice. "How much would it have cost them to send some guard to accompany that woman to the Emergency Hospital!"

Manuel and the Snake-Man spent more than two hours on the bench. At the end of this time the guards escorted them to another room in which was a tall man with a black beard combed in *chulo* fashion; he looked like a gambler or a *croupier*.

"Who are these persons?" asked the man, in an Andalusian accent. . . . As he twirled his moustaches, a diamond ring on his finger shot dazzling gleams.

"They're the fellows who've been sleeping in the San Sebastian church," said the guard. "They haven't any home."

"Begging your pardon," interrupted Don Alonso. "By sheer accident. . . ."

"Well, we'll give them a home for a fortnight," said the tall man.

Before Don Alonso could utter a word one of the guards shoved him rudely out of the room. Manuel followed him.

The two guards made them descend the stairways and put them into a dark room where, after some groping, they located a bench.

"Well, better times are coming," said Don Alonso, sitting down and heaving a deep sigh.

Manuel, despite the fact that the situation was by no means a comical one, was seized with such an impulse to laugh that he could not contain it.

"What are you laughing at, sonny?" asked Don Alonso.

Manuel could not explain the reason for his laughter; but after a long siege of this hilarity he was left in a funereal mood.

"What would Jesús say if he were here!" muttered Manuel. "In the house of God, where all are equal, it is a crime to enter and rest. The sexton hands a fellow over to the guards; the guards thrust a fellow into a dark cell. And who's to know what they're going to do to us! I'm afraid they'll take us off to prison, if, for that matter, they don't hang us altogether."

"Don't talk nonsense. If they'd only give us a bite to eat!" moaned Don Alonso.

"They must be considering that."

It must have been about one or two in the morning when the door to this pig-pen was opened. The Snake-Man and Manuel were led by two guards into the street.

"Say, where are you taking us?" inquired Don Alonso, a little scared.

"Keep on moving ahead," replied the guard.

"This is an outrage," muttered Don Alonso.

"You walk ahead, unless you want to march tied elbow to elbow," snarled the guard.

They crossed the Puerta del Sol, continued

through the Calle Mayor and stopped before the Municipal Police Headquarters. To the left of the causeway, by a narrow stairway, they had to descend to a room with a low ceiling which was lighted by an oil lamp. There were a number of high cots where ten or a dozen guards were asleep in a row, with their clothes and shoes on.

From this room they descended another tiny stairway to a very narrow corridor, one of the sides of which was divided into two cages with huge gratings. Into one of these they thrust Don Alonso and Manuel, locking the gate after them.

A man and a knot of gamins surrounded them curiously.

"This is an outrage," shouted Don Alonso. "We've done nothing that gives them a right to imprison us."

"Neither did I," grumbled a young beggar who, according to report, had been caught asking an alms. "Besides, it's impossible to stay here."

"What's the trouble?" asked Manuel.

"One of these fellows has made a mess. He's sick and naked. They ought to take him to the hospital. He says they've robbed him of his clothes. The kids, though, say he gambled them away in the cell."

"And so he did," declared one of the ragamuffins. "We were sent up for two weeks. When we left prison, just as we had reached the gate, they grabbed us all again and brought us here."

By the light from the corridor could be made out, in the rear of that cage, several men on the floor.

Thrown upon a bench near the wall, naked, his legs curled up to his belly, the sick man was huddled into a threadbare cape; every move of his laid bare some part of his person.

"Water!" he begged, in a thin voice.

"We've already asked the sergeant for some," said the beggar. "But he doesn't bring it."

"This is savagery!" roared the Snake-Man. "This is barbaric."

As no one paid any attention to Don Alonso, he decided to subside into silence.

"That guy over there," added the ragamuffin with a laugh, "has syphilis and the mange."

Don Alonso sank deeper than ever into his melancholy and uttered not a word.

"And what are they going to do with us?" asked Manuel.

"They'll shoot us off to prison for a couple of weeks," answered the beggar.

"Do they eat there?" asked the Snake-Man, rising from the depths of his self-absorption.

"Not always."

There was a general silence. All at once there was a hubbub of voices in the passage-way; soon it became a pandemonium of women's shrieks, curses and weeping.

"Hey, there, quit your shoving!"

"Damn the cuss!"

"Get along with you, now. Get along," ordered a man's voice.

This was a rout of some thirty women who had been arrested on the streets. They were all locked

up in the cage next to the men. Some were shouting, others were groaning, and still others brought forth their choicest repertory of abuse, which they hurled at the heads of the Police Captain and the Chief of the Board of Health.

"There isn't a sound one among them," observed Don Alonso.

It seemed to Manuel that he made out the voices of La Chata and La Rabanitos. After locking up the women a sergeant came over to the men's cage.

"Señor Sergeant," spoke up Don Alonso. "There's a fellow here who's sick."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Señor Sergeant, perhaps you could do me a favour. . . ." added Manuel.

"What?"

"If there's any reporter around for police news, just tell him that I'm a compositor on *El Mundo* and that I've been arrested."

"Very well. I'll do so."

Before a half hour had gone by the sergeant returned. He opened the gate and turned toward Manuel.

"Hey, you. Compositor. Out with you."

Manuel stepped out, passed by the cage that held the women, saw La Chata and La Rabanitos in a knot of old prostitutes which contained a negress (all of them horrible), and hurriedly climbed the stairway to the room in which the reserve guards were sleeping. The sergeant opened the door, seized Manuel by the arm, gave him a

kick with all his might and pushed him into the street.

The City Hall clock was at three; it was drizzling; Manuel went off by the Calle de Ciudad Rodrigo to take shelter in the arches of the Plaza Mayor, and as he was weary, he sat down upon a door step. He was about to doze off when a man who looked like a professional beggar took a seat beside him. The fellow said he was a soldier back from Cuba,—that he could find no employment and, as far as that was concerned, was no good for work any more, as he had got used to living in constant flight.

"After all," continued the returned soldier, "I've got my luck with me. If I haven't died this winter, I'll never die."

The two spent the night huddled close to one another, and the next morning went to the Plaza de la Cebada on a foraging expedition. The soldier pilfered some nuts from a pile, and this constituted the breakfast of the two comrades.

Later they went down by the Toledo bridge.

"Where are we going?" asked Manuel.

"Here, to a Trappist monastery near Getafe. They'll give us a feed," said the soldier.

Manuel quickened his pace.

"Let's hurry."

"There's no need. They bring out the food after they themselves have eaten. So that even if you run, you don't gain anything by it. We must take our time."

Manuel moderated his gait. The soldier was a common sort; his nose was thick, his face wide, his moustaches blond. He wore a pointed hat, clothes covered with patches, an old muffler rolled around his throat, and in his hand, a stick.

They reached the monastery, walked into the porter's lodge and sat down before a table where six or seven men were already waiting.

"Can you write verses?" asked the soldier of Manuel.

"I? No. Why?"

"Because a few days ago I came here with a gentleman who was really as dead hungry as ourselves. While we were waiting for the meal he asked the name of the rector and wrote some verses to him that were as pretty as you'd wish. Then the rector sent for him and gave him plenty to eat and drink."

"It's a shame that we can't write a rhyme. What's the rector's name?"

"Domingo."

Manuel tried hard to find a word ending in *ingo,* but could not. And when the lay brother entered with a large pot that he deposited upon the table, Manuel forgot his task completely.

The brother then brought wooden spoons and distributed them among the beggars. Of these, all but one brought forth large cups; the solitary exception was a repulsive type with a swollen lower lip that protruded and was covered with ulcers.

"Wait a second, brother," said the soldier, before the other fellow could thrust his spoon into the pot.

"We're going to put the food into the cover of the pot and we'll eat from there."

"I don't know what you've got against me!" mumbled the beggar.

"You? You've got a lip that looks like a beefsteak."

Manuel and the soldier then ate and after thanking the lay brother they left the monastery and stretched themselves out on the field in the sun.

It was a beautiful May afternoon; the sun shone strong and steady. The returned soldier recounted some anecdotes of the campaign in Cuba. He spoke in a violent fashion, and when anger or indignation mastered him, he grew terribly pale.

He talked of life on that island,—a horrible life; forever marching and marching, barefoot, legs sunk into swampy soil and the air clouded with mosquitos whose bites left welts on your skin. He recalled a dingy little village theatre that had been converted into a hospital, its stage cluttered with sick and wounded. The army officers, even before the fantastic battles—for the Cubans always ran off like hares—would dispute the distribution of crosses, and the soldiers would make fun of the battles and the crosses and the bravery of their leaders. Then the war of extermination decreed by Weyler, the burning mills, the green slopes that in a moment were left without a bush, the exploding cane, and, in the towns, the famished populace, the women and children crying: "Don Lieutenant, Don Sergeant, we're hungry!" Besides this, the executions, the cold slaughter of one by the other with the machetes.

Between generals and lower officers, hatred and rivalry; and in the meantime the soldiers, indifferent to it all, hardly replying to the sharpshooting of the enemy, with the same affection for life that one can feel for a discarded sandal. There were some who said: "Captain, I'll remain here." Whereupon their guns were taken from them and the others proceeded. And after all this, their return to Spain, almost sadder than the life in Cuba; the whole ship loaded with men dressed in striped cotton duck; a ship laden with skeletons, and every day five, six or seven who died and were cast into the waves.

"And the arrival at Barcelona! Hell! What a disillusion!" he concluded. "A fellow would be waiting for some sort of reward for having served his country,—hoping for a little affection. Eh? Not a thing. Lord! Everybody looked at you as you went by without paying the slightest attention. We disembark in port as if we're so many bales of cotton. On the ship we had said to ourselves, 'We'll be swamped with questions when we get back to Spain.' Nothing like it. Nobody was in the least interested in what I had gone through in the Cuban thickets. . . . Go and defend your country, ha? Let the papal Nuncio go and defend it! So that he can afterward die of hunger and cold, and have somebody say to him: 'If you had any guts, the island wouldn't have been lost.' It's too damned much, I say! Too much! . . ."

The sun was already sinking in the west when the soldier and Manuel got up and went off toward Madrid.

## CHAPTER IX

Night in the Paseo de la Virgen del Puerto—A Shot Rings Out—Calatrava and Vidal—A Tango by La Bella Pérez

"ON nights when it isn't very cold," said the soldier, "I sleep in that grove near the Virgen del Puerto. Would you want to go there today?" he added.

"Sure. Come on."

They were at the Puerta del Sol, so they went down the Calle Mayor. It was a rather misty night; the mist was bluish, luminous, and tempered the wind; the electric globes of the Royal Palace shone in this floating haze with a livid light.

Manuel and the soldier descended the Cuesta de la Vega and entered a little wood that runs between the Campo del Moro and the Calle de Segovia. Here and there an oil lantern shed its pallid glow among the trees. They reached the Paseo de los Melancólicos. Near the Segovia bridge flames were leaping from the furnaces of a grease factory that had been installed in a hut. From the Paseo de los Melancólicos they descended into the hollow, where they took refuge in a shed and prepared to go to sleep. It was cool; several mysterious couples were moving around in the vicinity; Manuel curled up,

thrust his hands into his trousers pockets and was soon sound asleep.

The shrill blare of bugles awoke him.

"That's the Palace Guard," said the soldier.

The pale glow of dawn flushed the sky; soft and grey quivered the first light of day. . . . Suddenly, from very near, came the discharge of firearms; Manuel and the soldier jumped to their feet; they rushed out of the shed ready for flight. But they saw nothing.

"A young chap has just committed suicide," cried a man in a smock as he ran by Manuel and the soldier.

They approached the place whence the sound of the shot had come and beheld a young man, well dressed, lying on the ground, his face covered with blood, a revolver clutched in his right hand. There was nobody in the vicinity. The soldier drew near to the corpse, lifted the youth's right hand and removed two rings, one of them with a diamond. Then he opened the dead man's coat, went through the pockets, found no money and fished out a gold watch.

"Let's be off before anybody shows up," said Manuel.

"No," answered the soldier.

He returned to the shed where they had passed the night, dug a hole into the ground with his fingernails, wrapped the rings and the watch in a sheet of paper, buried them, and stamped down the earth with his foot.

"In war times, war methods," murmured the soldier, after having executed this manœuvre with extraordinary rapidity. "Now," he added, "lie down and pretend to be fast asleep, in case anybody should happen along."

In a few moments came a drone of voices from the hollow, and Manuel saw two guards pass by the shed on horseback.

People were hastening toward the scene of the suicide. The civil guards, after a search of the corpse, found a letter addressed to the judge in which the deceased declared that nobody was responsible for his death.

Manuel and the soldier joined the curious onlookers.

When they picked up the body and bore it off, Manuel asked:

"Shall we go back and dig the stuff up?"

"Wait for everybody to disappear."

The place was soon deserted. The soldier then disinterred the rings and the watch.

"I think this diamond ring is all right," he said. "How are we to find out?"

"At a jeweller's."

"If you were to go to a jeweller's in those rags of yours, with a diamond ring and a gold watch, it's very likely that you'd be reported and taken off to prison."

"Then what are we going to do? Could we pawn the watch?" asked Manuel.

"That's dangerous, too. Let's go and hunt up Marcos Calatrava, a friend of mine whom I got to

know in Cuba. He'll get us out of the fix. He lives in a boarding-house on the Calle de Embajadores."

Thither they went. A woman came to the door and informed them that this Marcos had moved. The soldier made inquiries in a tavern on the ground floor of the house.

"Old Cripple! Sure I know him. I should say!" declared the tavern-keeper. "Do you know where he hangs around nights? In the Majo de las Cubas tavern, over on the Calle Mayor."

To Manuel and the soldier this was one of the longest days in their lives. They were frightfully hungry and the thought that the sale of these rings and the watch could provide them with all they wanted to eat, and that fear kept them from satisfying this imperative need, drove them to distraction. They dragged themselves wearily through the streets, returning from time to time to inquire whether the cripple had yet arrived.

Toward evening they caught sight of him. The soldier walked over to him, saluted, and the three passed to the back of the tavern to talk things over in a corner.

"I'm expecting my secretary any moment," said Marcos, "and he'll arrange matters. In the meantime, order supper yourselves."

"You do the ordering," said the soldier to Manuel.

Manuel did so, and to add to the delay, the waiter said that the supper would be some time in coming.

While the soldier conversed with Calatrava, Manuel observed the latter closely.

Calatrava was a rare specimen, appearing at first sight almost ludicrous; he had a wooden leg, a very narrow face, as dry and black as a smoked fish; two or three scars graced his forehead; his moustaches were stiff and his hair kinky. He wore a bright-coloured suit with very wide trousers and reeled along on his natural leg as well as on his artificial; his jacket was short, somewhat darker than his trousers; his cravat was of red and his straw hat tiny.

In a beery voice Marcos ordered a few glasses. They drank them down, and soon a dandy came in, wearing yellow shoes, a derby and a silk handkerchief around his neck.

At sight of him, Manuel cried out:

"Vidal! Is that you?"

"Yes, my boy. What are you doing here?"

"Do you know this young man?" asked Calatrava of Vidal.

"Yes. He's a cousin of mine."

Marcos explained to Vidal what the soldier wished.

"This very instant," answered Vidal. "It won't take me ten minutes."

And indeed, within a short time he returned with two pawn-tickets and several notes. The soldier took them and divided them; Manuel's share was five duros.

"Listen to me," said Calatrava to Vidal. "You and your cousin stay here and have supper; you must

have plenty to talk about. We'll go off to somewhere else, for we've a few things to discuss ourselves. Take your cousin to your house for the night."

They left, and Manuel and Vidal remained alone.

"Have you had supper?" asked Vidal.

"No. But I've already ordered it. And your parents?"

"They must be all right."

"Don't you see them?"

"No."

"And El Bizco?"

Vidal turned ashen white.

"Don't mention El Bizco to me," he said.

"Why?"

"No, no. I'm horribly afraid of him. Don't you know what happened?"

"What?"

"Dolores La Escandalosa was killed."

"I didn't know a thing."

"Yes. The old woman was slain in a house called The Confessional, over toward Aravaca. And do you know who murdered her?"

"El Bizco?"

"Yes. I'm sure of that. El Bizco used to go to The Confessional to meet a gang of tramps like himself."

"That's true. He told me so."

"Have you spoken to him?"

"Yes. But that was a long time ago."

"Well, the newspapers that reported the crime say that the murderer must have been of extraor-

dinary strength, and that the woman must have gone there as if to a rendezvous. It was El Bizco, I'm certain."

"And haven't they caught him?"

"No."

Vidal was immersed in thought; it could be seen that he was making every effort to control himself. The waiter brought supper. Manuel attacked the meal voraciously.

"Boy, what a small appetite you have!" commented Vidal smiling, his calm having returned.

"Lord! I was as hungry . . ."

"Let's go out and have a coffee now."

Vidal paid the bill, they left the tavern and went into the Café de Lisboa.

While they were sipping their coffee, Manuel scrutinized Vidal. The youth's hair was very lustrous; it was parted in the middle and curly tufts fell over his ears. His movements betrayed a vast aplomb; his smile was that of a self-consciously handsome man; his neck was round, without any salient muscles. He spoke with a sympathetic ring in his voice, always smiling; but his shrewd, treacherous eyes betrayed the falsity of his speech; their expression did not harmonize with the affability of his affectionate word and his ingratiating smile. One read in them only distrust and caution.

"And you,—what are you doing?" asked Manuel, after having examined him carefully.

"Pse! . . . I manage to exist. . . ."

"But on what? How?"

"There are certain deals, my boy. . . . Then, women. . . ."

"But do you work?"

"That depends upon what you call work."

"Man! I mean, do you go to a shop. . . ."

"No."

"Have you a sweetheart?"

"At present I have only three."

"Christ! What luck! Where do you find them?"

"Around here. In the theatres, at dances. . . . I'm secretay of the Bisturi, and member of the Paloma Azul and the Billete."

"And through them you manage to get acquainted with plenty of women?"

"Of course! And then, as far as women are concerned, it's all a matter of gab. . . . Sometimes you've got to show them that you're sore, and let 'em feel your fist. . . ."

"You sure live the life! . . . If I could only do the same!"

"Why, it's as easy as pie! . . . I've got a peach of a kid now,—the prettiest skirt in the world and just crazy over me. She gave me this watch chain. . . . But the best of all is that there's a certain party hanging around me, pestering me, and I'll bet you could not guess who."

"How could I know? Some marchioness, maybe."

"No. A marquis."

"What for?"

"Nothing. He's courting me."

Manuel stared in astonishment at Vidal, who smiled mysteriously.

"Are you tired?" asked Vidal.

"No."

"Then let's go to the Romea."

"What have they got over there?"

"Dancing and pretty women."

"Sure. Let's go."

They left the Café and went up the Calle de Carretas.

Vidal bought two orchestra chairs. It was Sunday.

The air inside the theatre was dense, hot, saturated with smoke and with the respiration of hundreds of persons who during the entire afternoon and evening had piled into the place. There was a full house. The piece was as stupid as could be, infested with silly, coarse jests delivered in the most insipid manner imaginable, amidst the interruptions and the shouts of the public. The curtain descended and immediately there appeared a girl who sang, in a shrill voice that went horribly off key, a pornographic ditty without an atom of wit. Then out came a painted, ugly old hulk of a Frenchwoman in a huge hat. She advanced close to the footlights and intoned an almost endless ballad of which Manuel understood not half a word, with the refrain:

*Pauvre petit chat, petit chat,*
Poor little kitty, little kitty.

Then she executed a few turns, kicking one of her legs till it touched her hat, and disappeared. The curtain again descended; a moment later it rose, revealing La Bella Pérez, who was greeted with a round salvo of applause. She sang a popular song very badly, smiling through several errors, and retreating to the wings after the number. The piano of the orchestra then spiritedly attacked a tango, and La Bella Pérez issued from the wings in a ballet skirt, a toreador's cape around her shoulders, a Cordovan hat thrust down over her eyes, and a cigar between her lips. After the piano had concluded these introductory measures, she threw the cigar into the pit for the orchestra patrons to snatch at, removed her cape, and remained with her skirt tightly gathered back by her hands, thus revealing in sharp outline her stomach and her thighs. At the very first notes of the tango a religious hush fell upon the assemblage; a breath of voluptuousness stirred through the auditorium. Every face was aglow, every glance fixed glitteringly upon the stage. And the belle went through her dance with a frowning face and teeth tightly clenched, stamping her heels, causing her powerful hips to stand out when she would fold her skirts about her like a victorious banner. From this beautiful feminine body issued a stream of sex that maddened every spectator. At the end of the dance she placed the hat upon her stomach and gave her hips a wiggle that brought a roar of lust from the entire audience.

"That's the girlie!"

"There's what you call wiggling!"

"What a shape!"

The dance came to an end upon a volley of applause.

"Tango! Tango!" shrieked the spectators as if possessed.

Manuel, his eyes moist with enthusiasm, was shouting and clapping his hands wildly.

"Hurrah for lust!" bellowed a youth at Manuel's side.

La Bella Pérez repeated the tango. Behind Manuel and Vidal was a girl rocking a child in her arms; the tot's face was covered with scabs. The girl, pointing to La Bella Pérez, crooned to the child:

"See. See mamma."

"Is she the mother of this little girl?" asked Manuel.

"Yes," answered the nurse.

Without knowing why, Manuel suddenly lost all enthusiasm for the dance, and even imagined that behind the coat of paint and the rice powder that covered the dancer's face, lay a mass of rash and pimples.

Manuel and his cousin left the theatre. Vidal boarded at a house on the Calle del Olmo.

They walked off through the Calle de Atocha and at the corner of the Calle de la Magdalena they encountered La Chata and La Rabanitos, who recognized them and called to them.

The two girls were waiting for La Engracia, who had gone off with a man. In the meantime they were quarreling. La Rabanitos was swearing the

most solemn oaths that she was no more than sixteen years old; La Chata asserted that she was going on eighteen.

"Why, I heard your own mother say so!" she shouted.

"But why should my mother say any such thing? You sow!" retorted La Rabanitos.

"But she did say so, you cheap bitch!"

"When did I go into the business? Three years ago. And how old was I then? Thirteen."

"Bah! You were on the streets ten years ago," interrupted Vidal.

The girl whirled about like a snake, eyed Vidal from top to bottom and then, in a rasping voice, snapped:

"As for you, you're of the sort that takes a front seat and lets your friends go hang."

The hearers greeted this circumlocution with applause, for it revealed La Rabanitos's imaginative qualities. Thus calmed, she drew from her apron pocket her wrinkled, grimy certificate, and passed it around.

La Engracia came upon them while they were busied with the task of deciphering the certificate.

"What do you say? You treat," suggested Vidal to her. "Have you got any money?"

"Money! Yes! The housekeepers ask more and more. I don't know where they'll stop at."

"Come on. If only for a little nip."

"Very well. Come along."

The five of them trooped into a bun shop.

"This gentleman I was with," said La Engracia,

"is a painter, and he told me that he'd give me five pesetas per hour for posing as a model in the nude."

La Rabanitos was scandalized at the news.

"What good are you going to be as a nude model when you haven't any tits?" she shrilled, in her high voice.

"Naw! I suppose you've got them!"

"When it comes to that, I may not have any special reason for getting a swelled head," sneered La Rabanitos. "But I've got a better figure than you."

"Hell you have!" retorted the other, and affecting to pay no attention, she turned to chat with Vidal. La Rabanitos then took possession of Manuel and recounted her troubles with all the seriousness of an old woman.

"Boy, I'm all in," she confessed. "Naturally weak. . . . And then men are so brutal. . . . When they find a girl like that, they do as they please, of course, and everybody steps all over you."

Manuel heard what La Rabanitos was saying; but exhaustion and drowsiness precluded him from understanding. Two other girls entered the shop with a couple of vagabonds; one of the young men had a pudgy face, clouded eyes and an expression compounded of ferocity and cynicism. All four were drunk. The women began to insult everybody in the place.

"Who are those women?" asked Manuel.

"A couple of scandalous dames."

"See here, let's be going," suggested Vidal to his cousin, with the prudence that characterized him.

They left the bun shop; the girls went off toward the heart of the city while Manuel and Vidal walked through the Calle de Ave María as far as the Calle del Olmo. Vidal opened the gate to his house.

"Here's the place," he said to Manuel.

They climbed to the top floor. There Vidal struck a match, thrust his hand underneath the door, drew forth a key and opened. They crossed a passageway, and Vidal said to Manuel:

"This is your room. See you tomorrow."

Manuel took off his rags, and the bed seemed so soft to him that despite his weariness it was a long time before he fell asleep.

# PART THREE

# CHAPTER I

Can Better Times Have Come at Last?—Vidal's Proposals

WHEN Manuel awoke next morning it was already twelve. For so long his first sensations, upon awakening, had been of cold, hunger or anguish, that now, finding himself under a blanket, sheltered, in a narrow room with little light in it, he wondered whether he were dreaming.

Then all at once the suicide at the Virgen del Puerto came to his mind; there followed his encounter with Vidal, the dance at the Romea and the conversation with La Rabanitos in the bun shop.

"Can better times have come at last?" he asked himself. He sat up in bed, and catching sight of his rags strewn across a chair, was at a loss. "If they find me dressed like this, they'll throw me out," he thought. And in his hesitancy he slipped back under the sheets.

It must have been almost two when he heard the door to his room being opened. It was Vidal.

"Why, man! Do you know what time it is? Why don't you get up?"

"If they see me with those things on," replied

Manuel, pointing to his shreds and patches, "they'll throw me out."

"The truth is that you can't very well dress in the height of fashion," commented Vidal, contemplating his cousin's wardrobe. "A fine pair of dancing slippers," he added, lifting up a misshapen, mud-caked boot by the laces and holding it comically aloft the better to observe it. "The latest style worn by sewer-men. As to socks, none; drawers, the same, of the same cloth as the socks. You're splendidly outfitted!"

"As you see."

"But you can't stay here for ever. You've got to get out. I'll fetch you some of my own clothes. I think they'll fit you."

"Yes. You're a bit taller."

"Very well. Wait a moment."

Vidal left the room and soon returned with some of his own clothes. Manuel dressed hastily. The trousers were somewhat too long for him and had to be rolled up at the bottom; on the other hand, the shoes were not high enough, and were tight.

"You have a small foot," murmured Manuel. "You were born to be a gentleman."

Vidal thereupon thrust forward his well-shod foot with a certain feminine pride.

"Some young women would give a great deal to have a pair of *pinreles* [1] like these, wouldn't they? I don't like a woman with big feet. Do you?"

"I? My boy, I like them all sizes, even the old ones. There's so little to choose from. . . . Give

[1] Gipsy and thieves' cant for "feet."—Tr.

me a newspaper, will you. I want to wrap up these precious garments of mine."

"What for?"

"So's they won't be discovered here. That spoils a fellow's name. I'll throw them into the street. Likely as not, the chap who picks them up will think he's come upon a windfall."

Manuel wrapped up the rags with great care, made a neat package, tied it with twine and took it in his hand.

"Shall we start?"

"Come along."

They went out. It seemed to Manuel that everybody's gaze was fixed upon him and upon the package that he was carrying. He did not dare to leave it anywhere.

"Get rid of it. Don't be a simpleton," said Vidal, and snatching the bundle from Manuel's hand he threw it over a wall into a lot.

The two youths walked through the Calle de la Magdalena to the Plaza de Anton Martín and went into the Café de Zaragoza.

They took seats. Vidal ordered two coffees and toast.

"How self-possessed he is," thought Manuel.

The waiter returned with the order and Manuel threw himself ravenously upon one of the slices.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Vidal, gazing at him from time to time. "What a vagabond's face you have!"

"Why?"

"How do I know? Because you have."

"What's a fellow going to do about it? He looks like what he is."

"But have you been working? Have you learned a trade?"

"Yes. I've been a servant, a baker, a ragpicker, a typesetter, and now a tramp. And of all these things, I can't say which is the worst."

"You must have gone hungry many a time, eh?"

"Uf! . . . Plenty. . . . If only they were the last times!"

"They surely will be, man. They will, if you really want them to be."

"What do you mean? By going to work again?"

"Or some other way."

"Well, I don't know any other way of making a living, boy. Either work or steal; either be wealthy or beg alms. I've lost the habit of working; I haven't the nerve to rob. I'm not rich; so I'll have to go out begging. Unless I enlist in the army one of these days."

"All this chatter of yours," replied Vidal, "is pure rot. Can anybody say that I work? No. That I rob or beg alms? Not that, either. That I'm rich? Hardly. . . . Yet you see, I get along."

"You sure do. You must have some secret."

"Maybe."

"And might a fellow know what that secret is?"

"If you knew it, would you tell me?"

"Why, man . . . you'll see. If I had a secret and you wanted to rob it from me, to tell the truth I'd keep it to myself. But if you didn't mean to steal it from me altogether, but simply to use it for

your own livelihood and not prevent me from using it, too, then I'd certainly let you know what it was."

"Right you are. You're frank enough. . . . What the devil! See here, I'd do anything for you, and I don't mind letting you in on how we fellows live. You're a queer, good-natured duck. You're not one of those brutes who think of nothing but murdering and assassinating folks. I'll tell you openly—why shouldn't I?—I'm not much of a hero. . . ."

"Nor I!" exclaimed Manuel.

"Bah! You're brave. Even El Bizco had respect for you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you."

"You don't say!"

"As you wish. But getting back to what we were talking about: you and I,—especially me—were born to be rich. But as cursed luck would have it, we're not. It's impossible to make a fortune by working, and nobody can tell me different. To save up anything at all, you've got to poke yourself into a corner and work away like a mule for thirty years. And how much does a fellow manage to get together? A few measly pesetas. Total: nothin'. You can't make money? Then you've got to see to it that you take it from somebody else, and take it without danger of doing time."

"And how do you manage that?"

"That's the question. There's the rub. See here: When I came to the heart of the city from Casa Blanca, I was a petty-thief, a pickpocket. For

nothing at all they sent me up for two weeks to the cage in El Abanico, and when I think of it, kid, I get goose-flesh. I was more afraid than ashamed of being a robber, that's a fact; but what was I to do? One day, when I stole some electric bulbs from a house on the Calle del Olivo, the janitress, an ugly old hag, caught me in the act and began to run after me, crying, 'Stop thief! Stop thief!' I grew wings on my feet, as you may imagine. Reaching the San Luis church I dropped the bulbs, slipped in among the crowd in church and crouched into a pew; they didn't catch me. But ever since that day, boy, I've been scared out of my wits. Yet, as you see, despite my fright, I haven't changed my ways."

"Did you go back to stealing bulbs?"

"No, sirree. I stayed in the *Apolo* patio with that flower-girl that La Rabanitos hated so much. Do you remember?"

"I sure do."

"There was an interesting girl for you. Well, I was staying there when once I saw a fat guy in a white waistcoat chatting with some skirts. There were many people about; I side up to him, get a hold of his watch chain, tug at it gently till I pull the watch out of his pocket, then turn the ring so as to loosen it. As the chain was rather heavy there was the danger that, on separating it from the watch I'd hit the gentleman in the belly and so let him see that he'd been picked; but at this very moment there was some applause, people began to shove into the theatre; so I loosened the chain and made my escape. I was making off opposite San José for the Calle de

las Torres, when I felt a hand clutch mine. Boy, didn't I break into a sweat. . . ! 'Let me go!' I said.—'Shut up, or I'll call a cop!' says the other guy. (And I shut up.) 'I saw you lift that duffer's watch,' he says. 'I?'—'Yes, you. You've got the watch in your trousers pocket. So don't be foolish and come on have a drink on me in the Brígido tavern.'—'Come on,' says I to myself. 'This is a clever guy who must be in the game.' We went into the tavern and there the fellow spoke straight from the shoulder. 'See here,' he says to me. 'You want to get on at any cost, don't you? But you hate the Abanico, and I can easily understand that, for you're no idiot. Very well, then; how do you expect to get on? What weapons have you for the struggle in life? You're nothing but a fledgling; you don't know people; you don't the world. You come to my house tomorrow; I'll take you to a shop where they sell ready made clothes, you'll buy a suit, a hat, and a trunk, and I'll recommend you to a good boarding-house. I'll see to it that you make plenty of money, for you can just bet the softest snap in the world is getting the dough where there's plenty of it. Now hand over that watch. They'd fool you.' "

"And did you hand it over to him?"

"Yes. Next day. . . ."

"You must have been left empty-handed. . . ."

"The next day I was already making money."

"And who's this man?"

"Marcos Calatrava."

"Old Cripple? The soldier's friend?"

"That's the guy. So now you know. What he

said to me, I say to you. Do you want to join the gang?"

"But what am I supposed to do?"

"That depends on the business in hand. . . . If you accept, you'll live an easy life, have a swell dame . . . and there'll be no danger. . . . It's up to you."

"I don't know what to say, boy. If it means being up to rascality, I almost prefer living as I am."

"Man! That depends upon what you call rascality. Do you call deceiving rascality? Then you have to deceive. There's no other way out. Either work or trick people out of it, for as to being presented with money, make up your mind they don't do such things."

"Yes, that's true enough."

"Why, my boy, everything is trickery. Business and robbery are the same thing. The only difference is that in business you're a respectable person, while for robbery they take you to jail."

"Do you really believe so . . . ?"

"Sure I do. What's more, I believe that there are only two kinds of men in the world: the first live well and rob either labour or money; the second live badly and are robbed."

"Say, you're talking sense, you are!"

"You bet. . . . It's eat or be eaten. Well, what do you say?"

"What should I say? I accept. Another Society like the Three."

"Don't make any comparisons. We don't want to recall the other one. There's no Bizco in this combination."

"But there's a Cripple."

"Yes, but a Cripple who has guts."

"Is he the chief of the party?"

"I'll tell you the truth, kid. . . . I don't know. I deal with the Cripple, the Cripple deals with the Master, and the Master with Lord knows whom. What I do know is that higher up, at the very top, there are some big guns. Let me give you one word of advice: see, hear, and keep your mouth shut. If you ever get wind of anything, let me know; outside, not a word. Understand?"

"I get you."

"It's all a matter of cleverness in this game,—keeping your eyes open and not letting anybody put anything over on you. If things go well, within a few years we can be on Easy street, as respectable as any one could wish. . . . A cinch. . . ."

"Listen," said Manuel. "Have you come up yet for military service? For I'll be damned if I know whether I have."

"Sure. I was dismissed. You'd better see to that. Otherwise they'll seize you as a deserter."

"Pse!"

"We'll let Old Cripple know about it."

"When shall we see him?"

"He ought to be here in a moment."

And surely enough, shortly after, the Cripple entered the café. Vidal, in a few words,

told him what he had proposed to his cousin.

"Will he do?" asked Calatrava, eyeing Manuel sharply.

"Yes. He's cleverer than he looks," answered Vidal, laughing.

Manuel drew himself up proudly to his full height.

"Very well; we'll see. For the present he won't have very much to do," answered the Cripple.

Thereupon Calatrava and Vidal entered upon a discussion of their private affairs, while Manuel passed the time with a newspaper.

After they had finished talking, Calatrava left the café and the two cousins were once more alone.

"Let's go to the Círculo," suggested Vidal.

The Círculo was on one of the central thoroughfares. They went in; the ground floor contained a billiard and pool room, and several restaurant tables.

Vidal took a seat at one of these, struck a bell, and to the waiter who answered this summons, said:

"For two."

"Right away."

"Listen," added Vidal, to Manuel: "From the moment we get into here, not a word. Ask me nothing; say nothing. Whatever you need to know, I'll tell you."

They ate; Vidal chattered about theatres, clubs, things that Manuel had never heard about. He remained silent.

"Let's take coffee upstairs," said Vidal.

Near the counter there was a door; from this rose a very narrow winding stairway to the mezzanine.

The stairway led to a door of ground glass. Vidal pushed it open and they walked into a corridor flanked with green screens.

At the end of this passage, a man sat at a table, writing. He looked up at Vidal and Manuel and then resumed his work. Vidal opened another door, drew aside a heavy curtain and made way for them both.

They found themselves in a large room with three little balconies that looked out upon the street and three others giving upon the patio. On the side toward the street stood a large green table, sunken in at the two longer sides; near the patio was a smaller table, illuminated by two lamps, around which were crowded some thirty or forty persons. There was a deep silence; nothing was heard save the voices of the two *croupiers* and the sounds of their rakes scraping in the money laid upon the green carpet.

After each play there would be a discussion among the players. Then the monotonous voice of the banker would say:

*"Faites vos jeux, messieurs."*

The murmur of conversation would cease and the silence would be so great that one might hear the shuffling of the cards between the fingers of the *croupier.*

"This looks like a church, doesn't it?" whispered Vidal. "As one of the gentlemen who comes here says, gambling is the only religion that's left."

They had some coffee and a glass of whiskey.

"Have you any cigars?" asked Vidal.

"No."

"Have one. Watch this game closely. I'm going."

"Might a fellow know what it's called?"

"Sure. Baccarat. Listen: at eight, in the Café de Lisboa."

Vidal went out and Manuel was left alone. He watched the money pass to and fro between the bank and the players, the players and the bank. Then he amused himself by watching the gamblers. The participants were so intent upon their game that no one paid any attention to his neighbour.

Those who were seated had in front of them heaps of silver and chips which they placed upon the carpet. The *croupier* would lay out the French cards and shortly afterward pay out or take in the money thus placed.

Those who were standing around the table, the majority of whom were not taking part in the game, seemed as deeply interested as, if not more so than, the persons seated and playing heavily.

They were specimens of poverty and horrible sordidness; they wore threadbare coats, greasy hats, baggy trousers spattered with mud.

Their eyes were aflame with the passion of the game, and they followed the progress of the plays with their arms clasped behind their backs and their bodies bent forward, holding in their breath.

The scene finally bored Manuel. He gazed into the street from the balconies. He watched players leave and new ones take their places. Toward nightfall he left for the Café de Lisboa.

Vidal arrived; they ate supper, and as they did

so, Manuel expressed his doubts as to the game.

"That's all right. You'll pick it up soon enough," assured Vidal. "Besides, the first few days I'll give you a little card with information as to when you're to play."

"Fine. And the money?"

"Here's enough for tomorrow. Fifty duros."

"Is this good money?"

"Show it to anybody you please."

"Then this is a scheme something like El Pastiri's?"

"The very thing."

The following afternoon, with the fifty duros that his cousin gave him and according to the instructions written upon a card, he played and won twenty duros, which he handed over to Vidal.

A few days later he was summoned to a barracks, sent to an office, where his name was asked, and then was told to go.

"You've been dismissed," said Vidal.

"Good," replied Manuel gleefully. "I'm glad I'm not going to be a soldier."

He continued to visit the Círculo on every day that he was sent there. At the end of a certain time he knew every one of the personnel. There were numerous employees attached to the place; several dandified *croupiers* with neat, perfumed hands; a number of bullies, as many pimps and still others who kept watch over all visitors and the pimps as well.

These were all specimens who lacked anything like a moral sense,—who, some through poverty and

hard life, others through inclination to a disorderly existence, had ruined and beclouded their conscience and broken the mainspring of will.

Without clearly realizing it, Manuel felt repugnance for these surroundings and vaguely heard the protest of his conscience.

## CHAPTER II

El Garro—Marcos Calatrava—The Master—Confidences

ONE night Manuel left the Círculo in company of a puny, sickly looking fellow. They were both bound in the same direction; they entered the Café de Lisboa; there the dwarf met a corpulent woman and sat down at a table with her. Manuel approached his cousin.

"What were you talking about to him?" asked Vidal.

"Nothing. About indifferent matters."

"I warn you that he's one of the police."

"Is that so?"

"I should say."

"But I saw him at the Círculo."

"Yes. He goes there to collect graft. He's married to that fatty he's with now; her name's La Chana, and she's an old hand at swindling. She used to live on the Calle de La Visitación when I went around with Violeta. At that time La Chana ran a 'fence.' She knew every inspector on the force and lived with a bully called The Minister who was killed on the Calle de Alcalá. Watch out for El Garro; if he asks you anything, don't answer a word. On the other hand, if you can pump anything out of him, by all means do so."

The next day El Garro again managed to join Manuel, asking who he was and where he came from. Manuel, now on his guard, told him a string of lies with a face of the utmost innocence, pretending to be the dupe of Vidal and the Cripple.

"I want to tip you off that those fellows are a pair of shrewd birds," said the police agent.

"Gee! You don't say!"

"Uf! It would be better if they were out of sight! The Cripple, especially, is as crooked as they make them. Don't get mixed up with him, for he's likely to do anything."

"Is that how wild he is?"

"You just bet. I know his history, all right, though he doesn't know that I do. His name is Marcos Calatrava, and he comes of good family. Only two years ago he was studying medicine."

El Garro related the entire life story of Marcos. At first he had been an excellent student. Then all at once he became a habituée of dives and dens, in one of which he once stole a cape. He was unfortunate enough to be caught red-handed; they took him off to the Model Prison and he stayed there two months. The following year he made up his mind to give up studying, and since they no longer sent him money from home he began a life of bullying around gambling resorts and joints. During a fight he was stabbed, and for a while this cooled his enthusiasm for swaggering. When he got well he went to see the Mother Superior of the San Carlos Sisters of Charity and asked her for some money. He wished to become a monk, he said; he had been

touched by the divine grace. With his honeyed speech he convinced the woman; he not only got the money from her, but also a letter to the prior of a monastery of Burgos.

Calatrava squandered the money and within two or three months was at the point of starvation Hereupon he organized a company of strolling players whom he exploited in the most conscienceless manner, and about a year or so after he had received the letter from the Mother Superior, during a period of terrible famine, he came upon it at the bottom of a trunk and made up his mind to use it. As he was a man of rapid decisions, he did not hesitate, took the train without a ticket, and arrived at Burgos amongst the freight. He presented himself at the monastery and entered as a novice. Within a short time he requested them to send him among the towns collecting alms. At first he was excellent, even distinguishing himself for his zeal. Soon, however, he began to commit barbarities, scandalizing the pious inhabitants of the villages. When the prior, who had been apprised of his exploits, sent him an order to return to the monastery, Calatrava, paying no attention to the command, continued to swindle the townsfolk. When they were about to apprehend him, he returned to Madrid. After three or four months in the capital he exhausted all his money and his credit, and decided to enlist in the medical section of the army and go off to the Philippines.

An army physician, seeing how clever and ready to assist this Marcos was, tried to help him complete

his course and placed him as an interne in the military hospital at Manila.

At once Calatrava set about robbing the hospital pharmacy of medicines, bandages, apparatus,—whatever he could lay hands upon to sell. He was discharged; he asked for permanent papers and gave himself up to exploiting the gamblers in the Manila dives. As he was so fastidious, life there soon became impossible for him, whereupon he fell back upon a military club and succeeded in having them raise a collection for him. With that money he returned to Spain.

Once in Madrid he was soon out of funds again, but as he was not of the kind who drown in a little water, he enlisted in a battalion of volunteers en route to Cuba. Marcos won distinction through his bravery in many a battle, rose soon to a sergeantcy, when a bullet entered his leg and they had to amputate it in the Havana Hospital. The fellow now returned to Spain, with no future ahead of him and only a ridiculous pension to fall back upon.

Here he went around pretending to be one of the secret service, tramping the streets, until he took up with a partner and dedicated himself to burial swindles, which, despite the extent of their practice, still yield results to professional imposters. At one time he formed a society of espadistas and domestics for the robbing of houses; he forged notes; then there was no deceit or swindle to which he would not stoop; and as he was a nimble-witted, clear-eyed fellow, he made a methodical study of all the known methods of trickery; he weighed the pros and the

contras of each and every one, and found that they all had their disadvantages.

"At last," concluded El Garro, "he met the Master, who has retired. I don't know myself where they got the money for these dives; but the fact is that they have them."

"Are there more than one of these Círculos?" asked Manuel.

"This is the only one that's open to the public. But they have the house belonging to the Colonel's wife, where much more gambling goes on. That's where the Master is every night. Haven't you ever been to that house?"

"No."

"They'll take you there, all right. If you have any money to lose, between Vidal and the Cripple they'll take you there. Then the Colonel's wife, since she's launching her daughter as a dancer, is going to open a salon."

"Is this Colonel's wife a Cuban?" asked Manuel.

"Yes."

"Then I know her. And I know a friend of hers, too, whose name is Mingote."

The agent eyed Manuel with a certain suspicion.

"Then you may say," he went on, "that you know the worst scoundrels in Madrid. Mingote is at present with Joaquina la Verdeseca. They run a high-toned house of assignation. Women come there and leave their photographs. It was Mingote who organized that celebrated ball. It cost a duro to get in, and at the end they raffled off a woman: the daughter of Mingote's mistress."

A few days after this conversation Manuel, leaving the Círculo and coming upon Vidal, felt the need of confiding to his cousin the dissatisfaction he felt with this sort of life. That night Vidal was in a gloomy mood himself and confided several sad tales to Manuel, too.

They went to a theatre, but there was no audience to speak of; they entered a café, and after spending a terribly cold night Vidal suggested that they go to La Concha's, on the Calle de Arlaban, for a bite.

Manuel was averse, for he felt neither like eating nor like doing anything else. He tagged after Vidal, however. It was very warm inside; they took seats and Vidal ordered a couple of whiskys and cutlets.

"A fellow must forget," he said, after giving his order.

Manuel made a gesture of displeasure and emptied a glass of wine that Vidal had poured out.

Then he told the story that El Garro had related to him. His cousin drank in every word.

"I didn't know Calatrava's life history," he confessed, after Manuel had finished.

"Well, tit for tat," answered Manuel. You tell me, now, who is this Master?"

"The Master . . . is a colossus. Did you ever read 'Rocambole?' "

"No."

Vidal paused a while; the figure of Rocambole [1]

[1] Rocambole is a personage out of the French novels of Ponson du Terrail; his name typifies banditry allied to boldness and breeding.—Tr.

struck him, no doubt, as most fit for a likeness to the Master.

"Very well. Then imagine a man like the Cripple. Get me? But ever so much cleverer; a man who can imitate any handwriting, who knows four or five languages, who's always master of himself, who can wear a workman's smock or a frock coat with the same ease, who can talk to a lady and appear the finest of gentlemen, and then gossip with a street-walker and seem a loafer; and add to this that he's a sort of clown, that he plays the accordion, that he can imitate a train, make funny motions and mock at everybody. And yet, with all this, boy, you can catch him sometimes half in tears at sight of a half-naked ragamuffin on the street, or because a little girl has asked him for an alms."

"And what's his name?"

"How should I know? Nobody does. Some folks say that they knew his father and mother, but it's not so. I've wondered myself whether he mightn't be the illegitimate son of some noble, but I can't altogether believe that, for if it had really been so, it would be shocking that they should have arrested him, as they did, when he was seventeen."

"He began early."

"Yes. They arrested him without cause. He was in the employ of a fellow who'd managed some swindle, and they shut him up in the Saladero together with his employer. He tells the story himself. One day, it seems, the judge was about to take a deposition from some prisoner, and as the clerk was copying the deposition he was taken sud-

denly ill and they had to remove him to his home. The judge asked the jailer whether they had any prisoner who could copy down from dictation, whereupon the jailer summoned the Master. He sat down in the clerk's chair, looked over the documents and began to write. The judge, after the deposition was over, casts a glance at the papers and opens his eyes in amazement. It was impossible to tell where the Master had begun and where the clerk had left off; the handwriting of one and the other was the same.

"What a clever rogue!"

"When the Master told this story, he said that if the judge hadn't been a stupid ass, he would not have met such a bad end; but the only thing that occurred to the judge was to declare that this boy was a dangerous fellow and that they'd have to keep a close watch upon him. The Master, who noticed that they became even more watchful, and this after he had done them a favour, naturally got angry. Later, in the Saladero, he became acquainted with a notorious forger, and between the two of them, in the prison itself, they did a Frenchman out of forty thousand duros through a burial certificate."

"The scoundrels!"

"They got away with five or six tricks of the sort. At last it was discovered that they were the culprits and they were prosecuted on fresh charges. They asked one of them: 'Who wrote this?' So one of them answered, 'I'. Then they asked the other, 'Who wrote this?' And he too answered, 'I.' They simply couldn't discover which it really was.

Then it occurred to the judge to have each of them put into a separate room and made to write the letter through which they had learned that a burial was being prepared. And, boy! The two wrote in the same handwriting, and even made the same erasures. Just imagine how clever that fellow must be, if several times, when there have been balls and banquets at the Royal Palace, he has forged invitations, has put on a dress suit and gone off to the king's residence, rubbing elbows with dukes and marquises."

"The deuce you say!" exclaimed Manuel, with admiration. "And is his companion of the Saladero still living?"

"No. I believe he died in America."

"Has the Master ever been to America?"

"He's been everywhere. He's travelled over half the globe, and in every corner of it he has left behind him some ten or a dozen forgeries."

"He must be rich."

"You just bet."

"And what does he do with his money?"

"That's something I don't know. He doesn't go in much for good times, nor has he any women. The Cripple told me once that the Master has a daughter who's being brought up in France, and that he would leave her a fortune."

"And where does this man live?"

"Over toward Chamberí. I think he spends the days there reading and playing the guitar, and kissing his daughter's photograph."

"I'd be curious to find out just what he does."

"Don't you try. I once felt the same curiosity. One day I saw him leave a bowling alley on the Cuatro Caminos. 'Let's see what this guy is up to,' I said to myself. I went there the next day and met him. He was in a jovial mood, playing, chatting, gesticulating. It seemed that he hadn't recognized me. The next day the Cripple says to me:

" 'Don't return to the place you visited yesterday, unless you want to break with me forever.' I took the hint and never returned."

The life of this unknown master, so pure and simple, yet so embroiled in swindlery and deception, was exceedingly curious. Manuel listened to his cousin as one who listens to a fairy tale.

"And the Colonel's wife?" he asked.

"Nothing. . . . A gawky skirt. She was the mistress of a watchmaker, who got tired of her because she's such an ordinary thing, and then she tied up with that soldier. She's a wicked, filthy old creature."

"She's wicked, to be sure. That's how she struck me from the first day I laid eyes on her."

"Wicked? She's a wolf, and has an awful temper. She's capable of the lowest tricks. Formerly, when some young gentleman would follow one of her daughters, she'd have him come into the house and there she told him that as to her daughters, there was nothing doing. They could have her, though. Now she hangs around the barracks. She's the cheapest of indecent hags. . . . But

what she's doing with her son is even worse."

"What's that?"

"Nothing. Just for the fun of it they dress him up as a girl and paint him up and don't call him Luis, which is his real name, but Luisita la Ricopelo."

"Christ!" muttered Manuel, bringing his fist down upon the table. "That's too much. That ought to be reported."

Three men and a girl took seats at the side table. One of them was a rouged old man with a face seamed with soft wrinkles and an air of repugnant cynicism; the other looked like a wig-maker, with his carefully groomed side-whiskers and his curled hair; the third, bald, with a red nose and yellow, matted hair, looked like the symbol of decrepit youth.

The girl was very pretty; she had a thin nose, very fine lips, black hair, evenly parted; she wore a pearl-coloured cape with a collar of feathers; her mantilla was caught up in her chignon, framing her face and falling across her bosom.

Her features betrayed a constant restlessness and a sarcastic expression; she could not keep quiet for a moment; even when she listened, she fidgeted about and nervously moved her lips.

The cheeks of the entire quartet were aglow and their eyes glittered. The bearded fellow kept asking the girl one question after the other; she answered with the utmost impudence.

Manuel and Vidal cocked their ears to catch the conversation.

"And you really believe in free love?" said the bearded fellow.

"Sure."

"Wouldn't you like to get married?"

"No, sirree."

"She's a cold fish," interrupted he of the side-whiskers. "She doesn't understand matters of affection."

"Bah. I don't believe that."

"The trouble with the poor girl is that she's very . . . brutish," muttered the old man in a whisky-soaked voice.

"And your wife?" she asked, hitching about in her seat and looking at the old man out of cold, jesting eyes. The girl gave the impression of some wasp or other creature endowed with a sting. Whenever she was about to say something she changed position, stung her interlocutor, and sat back, content and calm for a moment.

The old man mumbled a string of blasphemies. The fellow with the red whiskers continued his interrogatory of the girl:

"But haven't you ever loved anybody?"

"Not a bit of it. What for?"

"Haven't I told you she's as cold as marble?" muttered the chap who looked like a wig-maker.

"When I first became acquainted with that guy," she went on, laughing and pointing to the fellow with the side-whiskers, "I had a man who paid for my room, and the landlady passed as my mother. Besides, I had other gentleman friends; well, you see, nobody saw anything wrong."

"That's terrible," exclaimed the bearded old man, filling a glass with wine and gulping it down. "They don't care a bit for us, and here we imagine that they have a heart. But really, in all truth, tell me, haven't you ever loved anybody?"

"Nobody. Nobody."

"Haven't I told you," repeated the wig-maker's double, "that she's as cold as marble? If you only knew the crazy things I've done for her! I would ask for her timidly at the porter's lodge; a month would go by before I plucked up the courage to speak to her; and finally, after I'd got her, I discovered that she was the kind of woman to whom a fellow may say: 'Are you free tomorrow at such and such an hour?' 'Yes.' 'Well, then, see you tomorrow.' "

"Just as one would speak to a piano-tuner," interjected the bearded gentleman, discovering some relation or other between people and pianos. "It's awful," he added. And then, in an access of anger, he pounded his fist down upon the table and set all the glasses dancing.

"What's the matter with you?" asked the old fellow.

"Nothing. This piggish human brood of ours ought to be destroyed. I feel that I'm an anarchist."

"Bah! I think you feel drunk," interrupted he of the side-whiskers.

"Holy God! Just because you happen to be an indecent bourgeois given up to business. . . ."

"You're more bourgeois than I am."

The man with the red nose and the yellow beard lapsed into an indignant silence; then, turning to the girl, he said to her in an angry voice:

"Tell that imbecile that when a man of talent speaks he ought to keep his mouth shut. It's really our fault, for we give him the right of belligerency."

"Poor man!"

"Idiot!"

"You're more of a bore than any of the articles you write!" shouted he of the side-whiskers. "And yet, if all this pride you pretend were only truly felt, it would be well. But you don't feel it. You're an unfortunate wretch who recognize your own imbecility; you spend your whole life boring us stiff with the recitation of articles you've already published,—articles that aren't even your own, for you steal them right and left. . . ."

At this the bearded gentleman turned so pale that his interlocutor cut short his remarks. The trio continued their conversation in ordinary tones.

All at once the old man broke out into a howl.

"Then he can't be a respectable person!" he cried.

"Why not?" asked the woman.

"Because he can't. He must be a carpenter, a street-sweeper, a thief, or the son of a bad mother, for I can't see what reason a respectable person can have for getting up in the morning."

Manuel and Vidal had their supper. Shortly afterward the girl and her three escorts rose from their places.

"And now a fellow goes home," grumbled he of the red whiskers in a funereal tone, "makes his

bed, gets in, lights a cigarette, drinks a glass of water, urinates and falls asleep. Life is disgusting."

As the quartet went into the street, Vidal followed after.

"I'm going to find out who she is," he explained to Manuel. "See you tomorrow."

"So long."

## CHAPTER III

La Flora and La Aragonesa—La Justa—The Grand Opening of the Salón París

THE next day Vidal told his cousin that he had found out who the girl was. Her name was Flora, she lived on the Calle del Pez and went to a fashion shop on the Calle de Barquillo; the place was really a disguised house of assignation. Vidal meant to win La Flora.

He had already made some progress toward this conquest when Calatrava, who was satisfied with Manuel and Vidal, invited them one Sunday afternoon to a house on the Calle del Barquillo, where they would meet some good-looking girls and take them to Los Viveros. That afternoon was filled for Manuel with terrible emotions. Calatrava, Vidal and Manuel rode to the fashion shop in a carriage. They were shown up into a small parlour, regularly furnished. In a short while La Flora appeared, accompanied by a tall woman with black eyes and citreous complexion,—a really fetching wench who aroused intense enthusiasm in Calatrava.

"Let's wait till another one shows up," suggested Vidal.

They chatted for a while, waiting. Footfalls were heard in the corridor; a curtain was drawn

aside, disclosing a woman. It was La Justa, paler than before, her eyes blacker than ever, her lips red. Manuel stared at her in amazement; she turned her shoulder upon him and tried to sneak out.

"What's your hurry?" asked Vidal.

She made no reply.

"Very well. Let's be going," said Calatrava.

They left the parlour, and walked down the stairs; Vidal helped La Flora into the carriage that was waiting for them; Manuel entered with La Justa; in another carriage sat Calatrava and the tall, black-eyed woman. They rode toward the Puerta del Sol, and afterward, through the Plaza de Oriente to La Bombilla.

In their carriage, Vidal and Flora were talking away without pause for breath; La Justa and Manuel were silent as the tomb.

The lunch was a sad affair for this couple; when it was finished, Vidal and Calatrava disappeared. La Justa and Manuel remained seated before the table, at a loss for words. Manuel was penetrated by a grievous sadness, the complete annihilation of existence.

Toward nightfall the three couples returned to Madrid and had supper in a room of the Café Habanero.

They all exchanged confidences; each recounted his life and miracles, with the exception of La Justa, who did not open her mouth.

"I entered the business," said La Flora, "because it was all I had ever seen in my own house. I never knew what a father or mother meant; until I was

fifteen I lived with some aunts of mine who were as bad as myself. Only they were a happier sort. The elder of them had a boy, and she'd leave him in the drawer of a bureau, which she had turned into a bed. They hadn't any clothes, and if one went out the other would have to stay home; they wore the same pair of shoes and the same skirts. Whenever they found themselves without funds they would write to a woman who ran a house, would answer her call, and come back happily with their money. They wanted to place me in a shop, but says I, 'Nothing doing; if I must go to work, me for the gay life,' and I went into the business."

The other woman, she who was tall and beautiful, spoke with a certain bitterness. They called her Petra la Aragonesa.

"As for me," she began, "I was dishonoured by a young gentleman; I lived in Zaragoza, and went right into the business. As my father lives there, and is a carpenter, and my brothers as well, I thought of coming to Madrid so as to spare them the shame. So a chum of mine and myself planned to make the journey together. We each had about ten duros or more when we reached Madrid. At the station we take a carriage, stop at a café, eat, and then start out doing the streets. At a certain corner, I believe it was on the Plaza de los Mostenses, in a lane that I couldn't place or name for the life of me, we see a house with the windows all lit up, and hear the sound of a barrel-organ. In we go; two fellows started to dance with us and took us off to a house in the Calle de San Marcos.

"The next day, when I got up, my man says to me: 'Go on and bring the money you've got with you, and we'll eat right here.' I answered that there was nothing doing. Then another guy showed up and took us through the house; it was rigged up fine, with sofas and mirrors. He offered us some whisky and cake, and invited us to remain there. I didn't want to take anything, and left the place. The other girl gave every peseta she had to her man, and stayed. Afterward that guy took everything she earned and beat her into the bargain."

"And is your companion still living at that house?" asked Vidal.

"No. They transferred her to a house in Lisbon for forty-five dollars."

"Why did she go?"

La Aragonesa shrugged her shoulders.

"The fact is that the women in this business are beastly stupid," said Vidal. "They have no sense, they don't know their rights, nor nothing."

"And how about you?" asked Calatrava of La Justa.

The girl shrugged her shoulders but did not part her lips.

"She must be some Russian princess," snarled La Flora.

"Not a bit of it," retorted La Justa dryly. "I'm just what you are. A common woman."

They finished their supper and each couple went off in a different direction. Manuel accompanied La Justa as far as the Calle de Jacometrezo, where she lived.

As they reached the entrance to the house Manuel was about to take leave, averting his glance, when she said to him: "Wait." The watchman opened for them, she gave him ten céntimos, he gave her a long wax match after lighting it in his lantern, and she and Manuel began to ascend the staircase. The flickering light of the wax match made the shadows of the two fall alternately huge and small upon the walls. Reaching the third floor La Justa opened a door with a latch-key and they both entered a narrow room with an alcove. La Justa lighted an oil lamp and sat down; Manuel followed her example.

Never had Manuel felt so wretched as on that night. He could not understand why La Justa had asked him to come up with her; he felt inhibited in her presence and did not dare to ask her anything.

After they had exchanged a few indifferent words, Manuel managed to say to her:

"And your father?"

"He's well."

All at once, without any warning, La Justa burst into tears. She must have been overwhelmed by an irrepressible desire to tell Manuel her life's story, and so she did, with many a sigh and broken word.

The butcher's son, after taking her out of the shop where she worked, had dishonoured her and infected her with a loathsome disease; then he abandoned her and escaped to Madrid. A single recourse remained open to her: she must go to the hospital. When her father went to San Juan de

Dios and saw her lying flat on her back with rubber tubes thrust into her open groins, he was on the point of killing her then and there, and in a voice vibrating with fury declared that his daughter was dead to him. She burst into disconsolate tears; a woman in a neighbouring bed said to her: "Why don't you go into the business?" But her only answer was to weep harder than ever. When she was discharged she went back to the workshop, but the forelady would have none of her. It was now night, and she left the place ready for anything. She happened to be on the Calle Mayor; a man happened by, swinging a cane, and said to her: "Come along with me." They walked down the street together, and that man brought her to the station; they climbed to the top story and walked through a dark corridor into a room lighted by electricity. It was full of women who were chatting and laughing with the officials. At the end of some time a gentleman began to read a list and the women filed out. Only some twenty or thirty of the most filthy and tattered remained. They were ordered down several flights of stairs and locked into a cell.

"I spent a desperate night there," concluded La Justa. "The next day they took me to be examined and gave me a certificate."

Manuel could not find a word of solace; La Justa, sensing his coldness, mastered her emotion. They continued to chat. Then Manuel tranquilly gave an account of his own adventures; one recollection interwove with another, and they talked and talked unwearyingly. As they sat thus conversing the

flame of the lamp flickered for a moment and with a gentle sputter went out.

"That, too, is accident," said La Justa.

"No. It must have run out of oil," replied Manuel. "Very well. I guess I'll be going."

He rummaged through his pockets. There were no matches.

"Haven't you any matches?" she asked.

"No."

Manuel got up and groped about; he stumbled against the table, then, striking a chair, he paused.

La Justa opened the balcony shutter that faced the street, thus allowing Manuel sufficient light to find his way to the door.

"Have you the house key?" he asked.

"No."

"Then how am I to get out?"

"We'll have to call the watchman."

They walked out to the balcony; the night was cold, the sky studded with stars. They waited for the watchman's lantern to appear.

La Justa nestled close up to Manuel; he placed his arm around her waist. They spoke no more; they closed the shutters and hastened through the darkness toward the alcove.

They must accept things as they came. Manuel promised La Justa that he would find some honest means of earning a modest living, and that he'd take her out of this life at once. La Justa wept tears of deep emotion upon Manuel's shoulder. Despite the fascinating plans of regeneration which they formulated that night, Manuel made no efforts what-

soever; the one thing he did was to come and live with La Justa. At times the couple were filled with deep repugnance for the life they led, and would quarrel and hurl insults at each other upon the slightest provocation; but they made peace directly after.

Every night, while Manuel slept in that hole after many hours at the gambling den, La Justa would return exhausted with her round of the cafés, restaurants and houses of assignation. In the livid light of daybreak her cheeks were of a filthy hue and her smile was the essence of sadness.

There were times when she fell staggering into the room, dead drunk; as she entered the house and stumbled alone up the stairs, she was filled with a haunting fear and deep remorse. Dawn brought to her, as it were, an awakening of conscience.

Reaching the room, she would open the door with her latch-key, enter and lie down beside him, trembling with the cold but careful not to waken him.

Manuel grew quickly accustomed to this new life and the new friendships it brought; he was too lazy and too timorous to make any attempt at changing. Some Sunday afternoons La Justa and he would go for a stroll to the Cuatro Caminos or the Puerta de Hierro, and when they did not quarrel they discussed their illusions,—a change of luck that would fall into their laps without any effort on their part, as a gift from Providence.

During this winter the proprietors of the Círculo installed upon the lower floor, which was formerly

occupied by the café, a new venture,—the Salón París; upon the list of the sensational beauties who would grace the salon appeared dancers and singers of the most widespread reputation: the Dahlias, Gardenias, Magnolias, and so forth. In addition, as a special attraction, there was announced the début of Chuchita, the daughter of the Colonel's wife. Both as mother and as impresaria she was doing her best to exploit her child. On the day of the child's first public performance the mother distributed the claque over the whole house. Vidal, the Cripple and Manuel, in their capacity as chief claqueurs, occupied one of the first rows of seats.

"You'll all applaud, won't you?" asked the Colonel's wife.

"Don't you worry," answered Calatrava. "And if anybody doesn't like it, just look at the fine argument I'm carrying." He showed his cudgel.

Chuchita followed a hypnotizer upon the bill; she appeared to a salvo of applause. She danced without any suggestion of grace, and no sooner had she finished her song and danced the tango that followed it, than the stage was littered with floral wreaths and other gifts. After the conclusion of the part in which Chuchita appeared, Manuel and Vidal joined a number of newspaper men, among whom were two friends of the sculptor Alex, and together they all proceeded to offer their congratulations to the father of Chuchita.

They summoned the watchman and went into the house. The servant asked them to pass to the Colonel's room. That worthy was in bed, calmly

smoking. They all trooped into the bedchamber.

"Congratulations, dear Colonel."

The gentleman who was such a stickler for military honour received these felicitations without any realization of the sarcasm that flowed beneath.

"And how was it? Really, how was it?" asked the father from his bed.

"Very good. At first a trifle timid, but very soon she let loose."

"That's it. Dancers are like soldiers; as soon as they reach the field of battle, their courage rises."

Everybody, the journalists and the rabble that had tagged after them, greeted the epigram with derisive laughter. They left the colonel and went back to the Salón París.

The Colonel's wife, Chuchita and her blond sister, accompanied by a Senator, a newspaper man and a well-known bull-fighter, were getting ready for supper in one of the Círculo's private rooms.

According to popular gossip, Chuchita showed a decided inclination toward the bull-fighter, and the Colonel's wife not only did not seek to dissuade her, but had actually sent for the torero so that Chuchita's début might be in every way a pleasant event for the child. . . .

The opening of the Salón París gave Manuel and Vidal opportunity to make new acquaintances.

Vidal had become friends with Chuchita's brother, who hung about the theatre as a pimp, and the youngster took Vidal and Manuel to the dancers' greenroom.

When La Justa discovered the sort of friends

Manuel was now consorting with she raised a terrible row. La Justa had become bent upon making Manuel's life intolerable, and when she wasn't upbraiding him and telling him that he was nothing but a loafer who sponged on her earnings, she was exhibiting the wildest jealousy. Whenever she had one of these outbursts Manuel would shrug his shoulders resignedly, while La Justa, plunged for the nonce into the depths of despair, would throw herself prone upon the floor and lie there motionless, as if dead. Then her paroxysm of anger would pass, and she would be so quiet. . . .

## CHAPTER IV

An Execution—On the Sotillo Bridge—Destiny

IT was a night in August; Manuel, Vidal, La Flora and La Justa had just left El Dorado theatre, when Vidal suggested:

"They're executing a soldier at daybreak. Shall we take it in?"

"Sure. Let's go," answered La Flora and La Justa.

It was a balmy, beautiful night.

They went up the Calle Alcalá and entered the Fornos. At about three they left the Café and took an open hack for the place of the execution.

They left the carriage opposite the Model Prison.

It was too early. It had not yet dawned.

They circled around the prison by a side-street that was no more than a ditch running through the sand and finally reached the clearings near the Calle de Rosales. The structure of the Model Prison, viewed from these desolate fields, assumed an imposing appearance; it looked like a fort bathing there in the blue, spectral illumination of the arc lights. From time to time the sentinels sang out a prolonged watchword that produced a terrible impression of anguish.

"What a sad house!" murmured Vidal. "And to think of all the people shut up in it!"

"Pse. . . . Let them all be shot," replied La Justa, indifferently.

But Vidal could not feel this disdain, and grew indignant at La Justa's remark.

"Then what do they rob for?" she countered.

"And you, why do you . . . ?"

"Because I need to eat."

"Well, they need to eat, too."

La Flora now recalled that as a little girl she had witnessed the execution of La Higinia. She had gone with the janitress's daughter.

"There's where the scaffold was," and she pointed to the middle of a wall opposite the death-house. "The clearings were jammed with people. La Higinia came along dressed all in black, leaning against the Brethren of Peace and Charity. She must have been dead from fright already. They sat her down on the stool and a priest with a raised cross in his hand stood before her; the executioner tied her feet with rope, catching her skirts in the knot; then he blindfolded her with a black handkerchief and getting behind her gave two turns to the wheel. Right away he removed the handkerchief from her face and the woman fell stiff upon the boards.

"Then," concluded La Flora, "the other girl and myself had to run off, for the guards charged the crowd."

Vidal paled at this detailed recital of an execution.

"These things take the life out of me," he said, placing one hand over his heart.

"Then why did you want to come here?" asked Manuel. "Do you want to turn back?"

"No. No."

They proceeded to the Plaza de Moncloa. At one of the corners of the prison was a seething throng. Day was breaking. A border of gold was beginning to glow on the horizon. Through the Calle de la Princesa came trooping a company of artillery; it looked phantasmal in the hazy light of dawn. The company came to a halt before the prison.

"Now let's see whether they'll give us the slip and shoot him somewhere else," muttered a little old fellow, to whom the idea of getting up so early in the morning and then being cheated out of an execution must have appeared as the height of the disagreeable.

"They're executing him over toward San Bernardino," announced a ragamuffin.

There was a general stampede for the scene of the execution. And indeed, just below some clearings near the Paseo de Areneros the soldiers had formed into a square. There was an audience of actors, night-owls, chorus-girls and prostitutes seated around in hacks, and a throng of loafers and beggars. The barren area was fairly vast. A grey wagon came rumbling along at top speed directly into the centre of the square; three figures stepped down, looking from the distance like dolls; the men beside the criminal removed their high hats. The

soldier who was to be executed could not be seen very well.

"Down with your heads!" cried the crowd at the rear. "Let everybody have a chance to see!" Eight cavalrymen stepped forward with short rifles in their hands and took up a position in front of the condemned man. Not exactly opposite him, naturally, for, moving along sideways like an animal with many feet, they proceeded several metres. The sun shot brilliant reflections from the yellow sand of the clearing, from the helmets and the belts of the soldiers. No voice of command was heard; the rifles took aim.

"Put down your heads!" came again in angry accents from those who were in the third and fourth row of the spectators.

A detonation, not very loud, rang out. Shortly afterwards came another.

"That's the finishing touch," muttered Vidal.

The audience broke up and made off toward Madrid. There was the roll of drums and the blare of bugles. The sun glowed in the window panes of the houses nearby. Manuel, Vidal and the two women were walking through the Paseo de Areneros when they heard the crack of another discharge.

"He wasn't dead yet," added Vidal, paler than ever.

The four became moody.

"I tell you what," spoke up Vidal. "I have an idea for wiping away the unpleasant impression this has made upon us. Let's go for a little excursion and lunch this afternoon."

"Where?" asked Manuel.

"Over by the river. It'll remind us of the good old days. Eh. What do you say?"

"Right-o."

"La Justa won't be busy?"

"No."

"Settled, then. At noon we'll all meet at Señora Benita's restaurant, near the Pier and Sotillo Bridge."

"Agreed."

"And now let's be off to catch a snooze."

Which they did. At twelve Manuel and La Justa left the house and made their way to the restaurant. The others had not yet arrived.

They sat down upon a bench; La Justa was in bad humour. She bought ten céntimos' worth of peanuts and began to nibble at them.

"Want any?" she asked Manuel.

"No. They get into my teeth."

"Then I don't want any, either," and she threw them to the ground.

"What do you buy them for, if you throw them away afterward?"

"Because I feel like it."

"Suits me. Do as you please."

For an appreciable period they sat there waiting, neither breaking the silence. La Justa, at last beyond her patience, got up.

"I'm going home," she said.

"I'll wait," replied Manuel.

"Go ahead, then, and may they darn you with black thread, you thief."

Manuel shrugged his shoulders.

"And give you blood pudding."

"Thanks."

La Justa, who was on the point of leaving, caught sight just then of Calatrava and La Aragonesa, and Vidal in company of La Flora. She paused. Calatrava had a guitar with him.

An organ-grinder happened to be passing the restaurant. The Cripple stopped him and they danced to his tunes, Vidal with La Flora, La Justa with Manuel.

Now new couples appeared, among them a fat, flat-nosed virago dressed in ridiculous fashion and accompanied by a fellow with mutton-chop whiskers and the general appearance of a gipsy. La Justa, who was in an insolent, provocative mood, began to laugh at the fat woman. The aggrieved party replied in a depreciative, sarcastic voice, scoring each word:

"These cheap fly-by-nights. . . ."

"The dirty whore!" muttered La Justa, and began to sing this tango in a lowered voice, turning toward the fat woman as she did so:

> Eres más fea que un perro de presa,
> y á presumida no hay quién te gane.
>
> You're uglier far than a bull-dog
> And for impudence no one can beat you.

"Low-life!" grunted the virago.

The man with the gipsy appearance went over to Manuel and informed him that that lady (La Justa)

was insulting his own, and this was something he could not permit. Manuel was well aware that the man was in the right; yet, despite this, he made an insolent reply. Vidal intervened, and after many an explanation on both sides, it was decided that nobody had been insulted and the matter was composed. But La Justa was bent upon trouble and got into a scrape with one of the organ grinders, who was an impudent rascal by very virtue of his calling.

"Shut up, damn it all!" shouted Calatrava at La Justa. "And you, too, close your trap," he cried to the organ grinder. "For if you don't, you're going to feel this stick."

"Let's better go inside," suggested Vidal.

The three couples proceeded to a veranda furnished with tables and rustic chairs; a wooden balustrade ran along the side that overlooked the Manzanares river.

In the middle of the stream were two islets mantled with shining verdure, between which a number of planks served as a bridge from one bank to the other.

Lunch was brought, but La Justa had no appetite, nor would she deign a reply to any questions. Shortly afterward, for no reason whatsoever, she burst into bitter tears, amidst the cruel bantering of La Flora and La Aragonesa. Then she grew calm and was soon as happy and jovial as could be.

They ate a sumptuous meal and left for a moment to dance on the road to the tunes of the barrel organ.

Several times, it seemed to Manuel, he caught sight of El Bizco in front of the restaurant.

"Can it be Bizco? What can he be looking for around here?" he asked himself.

Toward nightfall the three couples went in, turned on the light in their room and sent for whisky and coffee. For a long time they chatted. Calatrava related with evident delight a number of horrors out of the war with Cuba. In that conflict he had satisfied his natural instincts of cruelty, slicing negroes, razing mills, spreading fire and destruction in his path.

The three women, especially La Aragonesa, were filled with enthusiasm by his tales. All at once Calatrava lapsed into silence, as if some sad memory had stemmed his garrulousness.

Vidal took up the guitar and sang the *Espartero* tango with deep feeling. Then he hummed the tune of *La Tempranica* very charmingly, enunciating the phrases sharply so as to give them fuller savour, and placing his hand over the orifice at times so as to mute the sound. La Flora struck a number of merry poses while Vidal, affecting a gipsy style, sang on:

Ze coman los mengues,
mardita la araña,
que tié en la barriga
pintá una guitarra!
Bailando ze cura
tan jondo doló. . . .
Ay! Malhaya la araña
que a mí me picó.

Then Marcos Calatrava seized the instrument. He was no player like Vidal; he could simply strum a few chords gently, monotonously. Marcos sang a Cuban song,— sad, languid, filled with a communicative longing for some tropical land. It was a lengthy narrative that evoked the negro danzón, the glorious nights of the tropics, the fatherland, the blood of slain soldiers, the flag, which brings tears to one's eyes, the memory of the rout . . . an exotic, yet intimate piece, exceedingly sorrowful,—and something beautifully plebeian and sad.

At the sound of these songs Manuel was inspired with the great, proud, gory idea of the fatherland. He pictured it as a proud woman, with glittering eyes and terrible gesture, standing beside a lion. . . .

Then Calatrava sang, to the monotonous accompaniment of his strumming, a very languorous, doleful song of the insurgents. One of the stanzas, which Calatrava sang in the Cuban dialect, ran as follows:

Pinté a Matansa confusa,
la playa de Viyamá,
y no he podido pintá
el nido de la lechusa;
yo pinté po donde crusa
un beyo ferrocarrí,
un machete y un fusí
y una lancha cañonera,
y no pinté la bandera,
por la que voy a morí.

For some reason which Manuel could not fathom,

the incongruous mixture that appeared in the song filled him with a vast sadness. . . .

It was darkling outside. Afar, the saffron-hued soil was gleaming with the dying quivers of the sun, which was hidden by clouds that looked like fiery dragons; a tower here, a tree there, yonder a ramshackle shanty, broke the straight, monotonous line of the horizon. The western sky was a caldron of flames.

Then came darkness; the fields sank into gloom and the sun disappeared.

Over the tiny plank bridge that reached from one bank to the other passed a procession of dark women with bundles of clothes under their arms.

Manuel was overwhelmed by an all-engulfing anguish. From the distance, out of some restaurant, came the far-off droning of a guitar.

Vidal ran out of the veranda.

"I'm coming!" he cried.

A moment . . . and a wail of despair rang out. They all jumped to their feet.

"Was that Vidal?" asked La Flora.

"I don't know," answered Calatrava, laying the guitar upon the table.

There was a din of voices in the direction of the river. All the patrons of the place dashed over to the balcony that looked out upon the Manzanares. Upon one of the green islets two men were engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle. One of them was Vidal; he could be recognized by his white Cordovan hat. La Flora, making sure it was he, uttered a shriek of

terror. In an instant the two men had separated and Vidal fell headlong to the ground, without a sound. The other man placed his knee upon the fallen man's back and must have plunged his dirk into him some ten or a dozen times. Then he ran into the river, reached the other side and disappeared.

Calatrava and Manuel let themselves down over the veranda balustrade and ran across the plank bridge to the little island.

Vidal was stretched face downward in a pool of blood. The dirk was thrust into his neck, near the nape. Calatrava pulled at the handle, but the weapon must have penetrated into the vertebrae. Then Marcos turned the body half way around and placed his hand over the man's heart.

"He's dead," he pronounced, calmly.

Manuel eyed the corpse with horror. The dying light of evening was reflected in its widely opened eyes. Calatrava replaced the body in the position in which they had found it. They returned to the restaurant.

"Let's be off at once," said Marcos.

"And Vidal?" asked La Flora.

"He's given up the ghost."

La Flora broke into a wail, but Calatrava seized her violently by the arm and enforced silence.

"Come on . . . clear out," he ordered. With the utmost self-composure he paid the bill, took his guitar and they all left the restaurant.

It was now night; in the distance, Madrid, a pale coppery hue, rose against the soft, melancholy, azure

sky which was streaked in the west by long purplish and greenish bands. The stars began to shine and twinkle languidly; the river shot back silvery reflections.

Silently they crossed the Toledo Bridge, each one given up to his own meditations and fears. At the end of the Paseo de los Ocho Hilos they found two carriages; Calatrava, La Aragonesa and La Flora stepped into one, and La Justa and Manuel got into the other.

## CHAPTER V

The Police Court Dungeon—Digressions—Manuel's Statement

ON the day following the death of his cousin Manuel eagerly bought the newspapers; they all had accounts of the murder at the restaurant; the customers present at the time were clearly described; Vidal's body had been identified and it had been established that the assassin was El Bizco, a jail bird who had already been tried for two robberies, and assaults, and the alleged perpetrator of a murder committed upon the Aravaca road.

La Justa and Manuel were thrown into a terrible panic; they feared lest they should be involved in the crime and be summoned to testify; they were completely at a loss.

After much cogitation, they decided that the most sensible course would be to move off somewhere into the suburbs. La Justa and Manuel sought a place, finding one at last in a house on the Calle de Galileo, near the Tercer Depósito, in Vallehermoso.

The rent was cheap,—three duros per month. The house had two balconies, which looked out upon a large clearing or vacant lot where the stone cutters hewed large boulders. This lot was marked off by a wall of chips left over from the stone cutting, and

in the centre was a shack where the watchman lived with his family.

The rooms were flooded with light from sunrise to sunset. Save for the terror produced in Manuel by Vidal's tragic end or by some inner impulse thus stirred, Manuel felt his soul quiver with eagerness to begin life anew; he hunted work and found it in a printing-shop of Chamberí. This being shut up all day within the walls of the shop was a violent trial for him; but the very violence that he was forced to practise upon himself gave him courage to persevere. La Justa, on the other hand, found the time heavy on her hands and went about forever in a glum, moody humour.

One Saturday, after a week of this exemplary life, Manuel returned to the house and did not find La Justa waiting for him. He spent a restless night hoping for her to come back; she did not appear.

The next day she did not return, either; Manuel broke into tears. He understood now that she had deserted him. This was the cruel awakening from a wondrous dream; he had flattered himself that at last they two had risen out of wretched poverty and dishonour.

During the previous days he had heard La Justa complain of headache, of lack of appetite; but never had he suspected this plot, never could he have believed that she would abandon him like this, in such cold blood.

And he felt so alone, so miserable, so cowed again! This room, inundated with sunshine, which

formerly he had found so cheery, now seemed sad and sombre. From the balcony he gazed out upon the distant houses with their red roofs. Far off lay Madrid, bathed in a clear, bright atmosphere under a golden sun. Some white clouds sailed slowly, majestically by, dissolving and re-forming into their fantastic shapes.

Workingmen's families, dressed in their Sunday best, tripped by in groups; faintly there came the gay strains of the barrel-organs.

Manuel sat down upon the bed and pondered. How many excellent projects, how many plans cherished in his mind had come to nought in his soul! Here he was, only at the beginning of life, and already he felt himself without the strength to fight the battle. Not a hope, not an illusion smiled at him. Work? What for? Set up one column after another of type, walk to work and then back to the house, day in and day out, sleep,—all for what? He was bereft of plan, idea, inspiration. He stared into the merry Sunday afternoon, the splashing sunlight,—gazed at the blue heavens, the distant spires. . . .

Immersed in his hazy thoughts Manuel did not hear the knocking at the door; it grew louder with each repetition.

"Can it be La Justa?" he thought. "Impossible."

Yet he opened the door in the vague hope of confronting her. Two men greeted his sight.

"Manuel Alcázar," declared one of them, "you are under arrest."

"What for?"

"The judge will tell you. Slip into your shoes and come along with us."

"Am I going to be locked up?" asked Manuel.

"Not unless you do something foolish. Up! Get a move on!"

The three men reached the street and walked to the Paseo de Areneros.

"We'll take a tram," said one of the policeman.

They entered the tram; it was so crowded that they were compelled to remain upon the platform. Reaching the Plaza de Santa Barbara they got off, and crossing two or three thoroughfares they brought up before Las Salesas; here they turned a corner, passed through a gate, and walked down a long passageway at the end of which was a dungeon. They thrust Manuel in and locked the cell from outside.

They say that solitude and silence are, as it were, the father and mother of deep thoughts. Manuel, in the midst of this silence and solitude, could not discover the most insignificant idea. And speaking of discovery, he could not discover even in the world of phenomena a place where to sit; nor was this so strange, for there wasn't a chair or bench, however humble, in the hole. Dejected and exhausted, he sank to the ground. He lay thus for several hours; all at once a pale illumination entered from above the door, through a transom.

"They've put on the lights," said Manuel to himself. "It must be night now."

In a moment there was a din of shouts and wails.

"You'd better obey orders, now, or you'll be the worse off for it," said a grave voice.

"But señor officer, I'm not the man. I'm not the man," protested a supplicating prisoner. "Please let me go home."

"Come along with you. Get inside!"

"In God's name! For the love of God! I'm not the man."

"In with you!"

There was the noise of the man being pushed into the dungeon, followed by the violent slamming of the door. The entreating voice continued to cry with wearing monotony:

"I'm not the man. . . . I'm not the man. . . . I'm not the man."

"Good Lord, here's a bore for you!" said Manuel to himself. "If he runs on like that all night long, I'm in for a fine time!"

Little by little his neighbour's lamentations abated, finally subsiding into a silent weeping. From the corridor came the rhythmic footfalls of some one who was pacing up and down.

Manuel rummaged desperately through his mind for some idea, if only to amuse himself with it; he could find nothing. The one conclusion he could reach was that it had grown light.

Such a lack of ideas led him, as if by the hand, into a deep slumber, which in all likelihood did not last more than a couple of hours, yet to him seemed a year. He awoke all mauled up, with a cramp in his side; throughout his sleep he had not been able

to shake off the realization that he was in a cell, but his brief period of rest had been so restorative that he felt strong, ready for whatever should arise.

He still had in his pocket the wages he had received at the printing-shop. Softly he knocked at the cell door.

"What do you want?" came the query from outside.

"I'd like to step out for a moment."

"Step out."

He walked into the corridor.

"Could you fetch me a coffee?" he asked of a guard.

"If you pay for it. . . . "

"Of course I'll pay. Send for a cup of coffee and toast, and a package of cigarettes."

"Right away," said the guard.

"What's the time?" asked Manuel.

"Twelve."

"If I didn't have to stick in that hole I'd invite you to have a coffee with me; but. . . ."

"You can have it out here. There's enough in one cup for two."

A waiter came with the coffee and cigarettes. They sipped the coffee, smoked a cigarette, and the guard, already won over, said to Manuel:

"Take one of these benches in with you to sleep on."

Manuel took a bench and stretched out at full length. On the previous day, though free, he had felt weak and crestfallen; now, though in custody,

he felt strong. Plans piled up in his thoughts, but he could not sleep.

Physical exhaustion consumes the strength and excites the brain; the imagination wings in the darkness as do nocturnal birds; and, again like them, it takes refuge in ruins.

Manuel did not sleep; but he dreamed and planned a thousand things; some logical, the majority of them absurd. The light of day, filtering dimly in through the transom, scattered his ideas upon the future and restored him to thoughts of the immediate present.

They would soon be along to take him before the judge. Now what was he going to answer? He'd cook up a story. Accident had brought him to the Sotillo Bridge; he did not know Calatrava. But suppose they confronted him with these people? He'd surely get all muddled. It would be better to come right out with the truth and soften it down as much as he could, so as to favour his case. He had become acquainted with Calatrava through his cousin; he saw him from time to time at the Salón; he worked in a printing-shop. . . .

He had just about decided upon this plan when a guard entered the cell.

"Manuel Alcázar."

"At your service."

"Proceed to the judge's room."

The two men filed down a long corridor and the guard knocked at a door.

"Have we your grace's permission?" asked the guard.

"Come in."

They entered an office with two large windows that afforded a view of the trees on the square. Before the desk was the judge, seated in a high-backed chair. Opposite the desk was a closet in the Gothic style, filled with books. A clerk kept entering and leaving, carrying heaps of documents under his arm; the judge would ask him a stray question and then hurriedly sign a paper.

When he had finished, the guard, cap in hand, approached the judge and informed him in a few words as to Manuel. The magistrate threw a hurried glance at the boy, who, at that moment, was thinking:

"I'll have to tell the truth; for, if I don't, they'll tear it out of me and it'll be so much the worse."

This decision infused him with a great tranquillity.

"Step closer," said the judge.

Manuel came over to the desk.

"What's your name?"

"Manuel Alcázar."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-one."

"Trade?"

"Typesetter."

"Do you swear to answer the truth to all questions put to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you do, then may Heaven reward you for it; if you don't, may it visit proper punishment upon

you. What did you do on the day of the crime?"

"On the night before, Vidal and myself, together with two women, went to see the execution of a soldier. After that we slept for a while in the morning, and at eleven I went with a woman to the restaurant near the Sotillo Bridge, where we had an appointment with Vidal."

"What relation are you to the murdered man?"

"I was his cousin."

"Did you ever quarrel with him?"

"No, sir."

"How did you make a living up to the day on which Vidal died?"

"I lived on gambling."

"What did you do to live on gambling?"

"I played with the money that was given to me, at the Círculo de la Amistad, and I handed over my winnings sometimes to Vidal and other times to a lame fellow named Calatrava."

"What offices did Vidal and this cripple fill at the Círculo?"

"The Cripple was secretary to the Master, and Vidal was secretary to the Cripple."

"What's the Cripple's real name?"

"Marcos Calatrava."

"Through whom did you come to know the Cripple?"

"Through Vidal."

"Where?"

"At the Majo de las Cubas tavern, over on the Calle Mayor."

"How long since is this?"

"A year."

"Who took you into the Círculo de la Amistad?"

"Vidal."

"Do you know a fellow nicknamed El Bizco?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you come to know him?"

"He was a friend of Vidal's when we were kids."

"Wasn't he a friend of yours, too?"

"Friend? No. I never had any use for him."

"Why?"

"Because he struck me as a bad one."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"What everybody means; that he was hard-hearted and that he tortured anybody who was weaker than himself."

"Have you a sweetheart?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is she a public woman?"

"Yes, sir," stammered Manuel, trembling with grief and rage.

"What's her name?"

"Justa."

"Where does she live?"

"I don't know. She left my house day before yesterday."

"Where did you get to know her?"

"At the home of a ragpicker where I was a servant."

"What's that ragpicker's name?"

"Señor Custodio."

"Is it you who are responsible for her being a prostitute?"

"Not I, sir."

"When you made her acquaintance, was she already a public woman?"

"No, sir. When I made her acquaintance she was a modiste; a man took her away from home; when I met her for the second time, she was already on the streets."

As he spoke these words, Manuel's voice trembled and the tears fought to issue from his eyes.

The judge contemplated him coldly.

"Whose suggestion was it to go to the restaurant near the Sotillo Bridge?"

"Vidal's."

"Did you see El Bizco hanging around the restaurant?"

"Yes, sir."

"Didn't that surprise you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you know that El Bizco had murdered a woman on the Aravaca road?"

"Vidal told me."

"After that crime of El Bizco's, did you ever speak to him?"

"No, sir."

"Never?"

"No, sir."

"Be very careful of what you say," and the judge fixed his stare upon Manuel. "After the death of that woman, didn't you ever—not even once—speak to El Bizco?"

"No, sir," and Manuel firmly sustained the judge's stare.

"Didn't it strike you as strange that El Bizco should be hanging around the restaurant?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why didn't you let Vidal know?"

"Because my cousin had told me never to mention El Bizco to him."

"Why?"

"Because he was afraid of him. I knew this, and I didn't want to scare him."

"When you saw that he was going, why didn't you warn him that it might be El Bizco?"

"It never occurred to me."

"What did you do when you heard Vidal's outcry?"

"I ran out to the restaurant veranda together with three women and the Cripple, and from there we saw Vidal and El Bizco on the little island, fighting."

"How did you know it was they?"

"From Vidal's cry, and also because he was wearing a white Cordovan hat."

"What time was it when this happened?"

"I couldn't say exactly. It was just getting dark."

"How did you recognize El Bizco?"

"I didn't make him out; I thought it might be him."

"Did Vidal have any money on his person?"

"I don't know."

"How long did the struggle last?"

"A moment."

"Didn't you men have time to run to his assistance?"

"No, sir. Very soon after we ran to the balcony, Vidal fell to the ground, and the other fellow made for the river and disappeared."

"Very well. What happened after that?"

"The Cripple and myself hurdled the balustrade, jumped into the river and ran over to the island. The Cripple grabbed Vidal's hand and said, 'He's dead.' Then we both went back to the restaurant and left."

The judge turned to the clerk:

"You will read him this declaration later, and have him sign it."

He then rang the bell and the guard appeared.

"He is to continue in solitary."

Manuel left the office, walking out erect. Several of the judge's expressions had cut him to the soul, but he was satisfied with his deposition; they hadn't got him all mixed up.

He returned to the dungeon and stretched out upon the bench.

"The judge wants to make me out as an accomplice in the crime. Either that fellow is mighty stupid or mighty wicked. Well, let's hope for the best."

At noon the dungeon door opened to admit two men. One was Calatrava; the other, El Garro.

"Hello, kid; I've just read in the papers that you were arrested," said Calatrava.

"As you see. Here they've got me."

"Have you made a statement?"

"Yes."

"What did you say?"

"Say! What did you think I'd say? The truth."

"Did you mention my name?"

"I should say so. I mentioned you, the Master and the whole crowd."

"The hell you did! What a beast!"

"Not at all. Did you imagine that I was going to rot here, though I wasn't in any way to blame, while the rest of you walked the streets in freedom?"

"You deserve to stick here forever," exclaimed Calatrava. "Yes, for being such an idiot and a squealer."

Manuel simply shrugged his shoulders. Calatrava and El Garro exchanged inquiring glances and then left the dungeon.

Manuel went back to his bench. The afternoon was half gone when once more the door opened, admitting the guard. He brought a dish of stew, some bread, and a bottle of wine.

"Who has sent me this?" asked Manuel.

"A girl named Salvadora."

The memory suffused Manuel with tenderness, and since tenderness did not take away his appetite, he ate his fill and then stretched out on the bench.

## CHAPTER VI

What Happened In the Judge's Office—The Chapter House

SEVERAL hours later the judge received three urgent letters. He opened them, and at once rang a bell.

"Who brought these letters?" he asked of the guard.

"A lackey."

"Is there any plain-clothes man about?"

"There's El Garro."

"Send him in."

The agent entered and came over to the judge's desk.

"In these letters," began the judge, "there is reference to the deposition just made by that boy arrested yesterday. How does it come that any one should have knowledge of his declaration?"

"I don't know."

"Has this boy been speaking with anybody?"

"Nobody," answered El Garro, calmly.

"In this letter, two ladies whom the minister can refuse nothing, ask him, and he in turn asks me, to quash this entire matter. What interest can these two ladies have in the affair?"

"I don't know. If I knew who they were, perhaps. . . ."

"They are Señora de Braganza and the Marchioness of Buendía."

"Ah, then I understand the whole thing. The proprietors of the Círculo where the boy used to work are anxious lest he speak of the gambling house. One of the proprietor's is the Colonel's wife, who must have gone to see these ladies, and then the ladies must have had recourse to the minister."

"And what's the connection between the Colonel's wife and these ladies?"

"She lends out money. This Señora de Braganza once forged her husband's name, and the Colonel's wife has the document in her possession."

"And the marchioness?"

"As to her, that's another matter. You know that her most recent lover was Ricardo Salazar."

"The former deputy?"

"Yes, and a dyed-in-the-wool rascal. One or two years ago, when the relations between Ricardo and the marchioness were still in the early stages, the marchioness would receive from time to time a letter which read: 'I have in my possession a note addressed by you to your lover, in which you say this and that (pretty intimate things). If you don't come across with a thousand pesetas, I'll see that your husband gets that letter.' She was scared out of her wits, and paid three, four, five times, until on the advice of a lady friend, and in agreement with an officer, they apprehended the man who brought

the letters. And it turned out that he was sent by Ricardo Salazar himself."

"By the lover?"

"Yes."

"There's a gallant cavalier for you!"

"When the marchioness and Ricardo fell out. . . ."

"On the discovery of this plot with the letter?"

"No. The marchioness forgave him for that. They had a quarrel because Ricardo asked for money which the marchioness couldn't or wouldn't give him. Salazar owed three thousand duros to the Colonel's wife, and that lady, who is nobody's fool, said to him: 'You hand me over the marchioness's letters and we'll cancel your debt.' Ricardo handed them over, and ever since that day the marchioness is bound hand and foot to the Colonel's wife and her associates."

The judge arose from his chair and walked slowly about the room.

"Then there's an impersonal note from the director of *El Popular,* asking me not to prosecute this case. What connection can there be between the gambling den and the owner of that paper?"

"He's one of the partners. In case the den should be discovered, the newspaper would start a strong campaign against the government."

"How's a man going to administer justice under such conditions!" muttered the judge, pensively.

El Garro gazed ironically at the magistrate.

At this moment the telephone bell rang; the ringing continued for an appreciable while.

"With your permission?" asked a clerk.

"What is it?"

"A message from the minister, asking whether the case has been disposed of according to his desires."

"Yes, tell him yes," grumbled the judge, ill-humouredly. Then he turned to the agent. "This youngster we've arrested,—isn't he in any way involved in the crime?"

"Absolutely none," answered El Garro.

"Is he the dead man's cousin?"

"Yes, your honour."

"And he knows El Bizco?"

"Yes. He was a friend of his."

"Could he help the police in the capture of El Bizco?"

"I'll see to that part of it. Shall the prisoner be set free?"

"Yes. We must capture El Bizco. Aren't his whereabouts known?"

"He must be in hiding around the suburbs."

"Isn't there any agent who knows the suburban hangouts well?"

"The best of them is a fellow named Ortiz. If you will kindly give me a note to the Chief to place Ortiz under my orders, I'll guarantee that El Bizco will be in a cell within a week."

The judge summoned a clerk, ordered him to write the letter, and handed it to El Garro.

El Garro left the judge's office and had Manuel released from the dungeon.

"Must I make another declaration?" asked the boy.

"No. You're to sign the one you made and then you're free. Come along, now."

They went out into the street. At the Court House entrance Manuel caught sight of La Fea and La Salvadora; the latter had lost her ordinarily dour expression.

"Are you free already?" they asked him.

"It looks like it. How did you learn that I'd been arrested?"

"We read it in the papers," answered La Fea, "and she thought of bringing you food."

"And Jesús?"

"In the hospital."

"What's the matter with him?"

"His chest . . . he's much better now. . . . Come right home, won't you? We live over on Mellizo Lane, near the Calle de la Arganzuela."

"All right."

"So long, then."

"Good-bye, and many thanks."

El Garro and Manuel turned the corner and entering a portal with a bronze lion on either side, climbed a short staircase.

"What's this?" asked Manuel.

"This is the Chapter House."

They passed along a corridor, between black screens, into a room where two men sat writing. El Garro asked for El Gaditano.

"He must be out there," they informed him.

The agent and Manuel continued on their way. The corridors swarmed with men who were scurrying to and fro in great haste. Others were motionless, in quiet attendance. These were ragged toilers, women garbed in black, sad old ladies bearing the stamp of poverty,—a frightened, timorous, humble rout.

The men who were scurrying back and forth carried letter-files and documents under their arms; all or almost all of them wore a lofty, proud expression. There was the judge who strode by in his cap and black frock coat, gazing indifferently through his spectacles; there was the clerk, not quite so grave and more jovial, who would call over some one, whisper into his ear, go into the office, sign a document and come out again; there was the young lawyer who asked how his cases were getting along; there were the procurator, the attorneys, the clerks, the office boys.

And here, too, thrusting this drove of humble and poverty-stricken human cattle toward the shambles of Justice, appeared the usurer, the policeman, jewel brokers, moneylenders, landlords. . . .

They all had an understanding with the office boys and the clerks, who saw to their affairs; these employés would pigeon-hole troublesome cases, arrange or embroil a suit and send a fellow to prison or take him out,—all for a small consideration.

What an admirable machinery! From the lowest to the highest of these pettifoggers, with or without a toga, they knew how to exploit the humble, the poor in spirit, and how to protect the sacred in-

terests of society by seeing to it that the needle on the balance of justice always inclined toward the side of wealth. . . .

El Garro found El Gaditano, and asked him:

"Listen, it was you who took down this boy's declaration, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, kindly put down that it is not known who killed his cousin; that it is supposed to be El Bizco, but that's all. And then order him released."

"Very well. Step into the office."

They passed into a small room with a window at the rear. Against one of the longer walls was a closet, on top of which lay a number of articles involved in recent robberies and seizures, among them a bicycle.

El Gaditano came in, drew a bundle of documents from the closet and began to write rapidly.

". . . That he's a cousin of the dead man and that it is supposed that the author of this crime is a fellow nicknamed El Bizco; isn't that it?"

"That's it," corroborated El Garro.

"Very well. Have him sign here. . . . Now, here. . . . That's all."

The agent took leave of El Gaditano; Manuel and El Garro went out into the street.

"Am I free now?" asked Manuel.

"No."

"Why not?"

"They've set you free on one condition: that you help in the capture of El Bizco."

"I'm not a member of the police force."

"Very well, then. Have your choice: either you help to capture El Bizco or you go back to the dungeon."

"Nothing doing. I'll help to capture El Bizco."

## CHAPTER VII

### La Fea and La Salvadora—Ortiz—Old Friends

THE two men strolled through the Calle del Barquillo into the Calle de Alcalá.

"They're not going to catch me again," thought Manuel. But at once it occurred to him that the texture of the law was so stout and close-woven that it was exceedingly difficult not to be enmeshed in it, no matter how careful a fellow might be.

"You haven't yet told me to whom I owe my freedom," exclaimed Manuel.

"To whom you owe your freedom? To me," answered El Garro.

Manuel made no comment.

"And now, where are we bound to?" he asked.

"The Campillo del Mundo Nuevo."

"We've got a long journey ahead of us, then."

"At the Puerta del Sol we'll take the tram for La Fuentecilla."

Which they did. They got off at the end of the line and proceeded along the Calle de Arganzuela. At the end of this street, to their right, having reached the Plaza that constitutes El Campillo del Mundo Nuevo, they stopped. They passed through

a long corridor into a wide patio ringed by galleries.

El Garro walked into the first open door and asked in a voice of authority:

"Does a police officer by the name of Ortiz live here?"

Out of the depths of a gloomy corner where two men were toiling near a furnace, came the answer from one of them:

"What are you bothering me about? Ask the janitor."

The two men were making rolled wafers. Out of a caldron that was filled with a white pasty mass, they were extracting ladlefuls and throwing them on to a pair of boards that closed like nippers. Once these nippers were closed they placed them in the fire, heated them on one side, then on the other, withdrew them, opened them, and on one of the boards appeared the wafer as round as a seal. Rapidly the man would roll it up with his finger and place it in a box.

"So you don't know whether Ortiz lives here or not?" asked El Garro again.

"Ortiz?" came a voice out of the black depths, where nothing was visible. "Yes. He lives here. He's the manager of these houses."

Through the black hole Manuel glimpsed two men lying on the floor.

"Well, if he's the manager, he was in the patio a moment ago."

El Garro and Manuel went into the courtyard and the agent caught sight of the captain on the gallery of the first floor.

"Hey, Ortiz!" he shouted.

"What do you want? Who's calling me?"

"It's me, Garro."

The officer hurried down into the patio.

"Hello, there, Señor Garro! What brings you here?"

"This youngster is a cousin of the fellow that was killed near the Sotillo Bridge. He knows the murderer, who's a cutpurse nicknamed El Bizco. Do you want to take charge of his capture?"

"Why, man. . . . If those are the orders. . . ."

"No, the question is, whether you have the time and want to do it. I have a letter here from the judge to your colonel, asking that you take charge of the capture. If you haven't the time, speak up."

"There's time, and to spare."

"Then I'll leave the letter with your colonel this very day."

"Certainly. I suppose there'll be a reward in the case, eh?"

"Don't let that trouble you. Here's the boy; don't let him out of your sight and have him go with you wherever you go."

"Very well."

"Anything else?"

"Nothing."

"Good-bye, then, and good luck."

"Good-bye."

El Garro left the house; Manuel and Ortiz were left face to face.

"You're not to leave my side until we capture El Bizco. Understand?" said the captain to Manuel.

This Ortiz, noted as a pursuer of gamins and bandits, was a typical specimen of the criminal. He had black, clipped moustaches; beetling eyebrows that met over his flat nose; an upper lip that drew inwards, revealing his teeth to the very roots; a narrow forehead with a deep scar in the middle.

He dressed in country fashion, with dark clothes and a cap. There was something aggressive about him that recalled a bull dog,—something ferocious that suggested a wild boar.

"Aren't you going to let me out?" asked Manuel.

"No."

"There were some lady friends I had to see."

"Lady friends don't count hereabouts. Who are they? Some street walkers, I'll bet. . . ."

"No. They're the sisters of a certain typesetter, a friend of mine. They were neighbours of mine in the Santa Casilda hostelry."

"Ah! So you lived there?"

"Yes."

"Then I must know them, too."

"I don't know. They're the sisters of a compositor, Jesús by name."

"La Fea?"

"Yes."

"I know her. Where does she live."

"Over on Mellizo Lane."

"It's right near here. Let's go to see her."

They went out. Mellizo Lane was up off the Calle de la Arganzuela, in the vicinity of the hog slaughter-house. The whole lane, which at its beginning was boarded up on both sides and obstructed

by huge slabs heaped one upon the other, could boast but a solitary house of decent size. This was situated at the end of the alley. Before the house, in a large yard, some *cañis* were fussing about with their mules and donkeys; in the galleries, old gipsies and young, swart, with shining eyes and gay-hued raiment, were flitting around.

They asked a gipsy where La Fea lived and he replied that she would be found at number 6, second floor.

On the door of the room was a cardboard sign bearing the announcement: "Machine Sewing."

They knocked, and a blond youngster appeared.

"This is La Salvadora's little brother," said Manuel.

La Fea came to the door and received Manuel with joyous effusiveness. She bowed to Ortiz.

"And La Salvadora?" asked Manuel.

"In the kitchen. She's coming right away."

It was a bright room, with a window through which entered the last rays of the setting sun.

"This ought to be a very cheery place," said Manuel.

"The sun shines here from dawn to sunset," answered La Fea. "We'd like to move, but we can't find a place like this."

The room was redolent of peacefulness and industriousness; there were two new sewing machines, a pine closet and some flower-pots upon the window ledge.

"And Jesús is still in hospital?"

"At the San Carlos Clinic," answered La Fea.

He had not wished to be a burden to the family; though La Salvadora would have cared for him at home, he had taken it into his head to go to the hospital. Fortunately he was now feeling very much improved and he was soon to be discharged.

At this juncture La Salvadora came in. She looked very pretty and wore an air of independence. Greeting Manuel and Ortiz, she sat down before the machine and began to sew.

"Will you stay with us for supper?" asked La Fea of Manuel.

"No. I can't. They won't let me."

"If you will promise me," interjected Ortiz, "that this man will come to me whenever I send for him, even at two in the morning, I'll give him his freedom."

"Certainly. We give you our word," declared La Fea.

"Very well, then. I'll go. Tomorrow, at nine in the night, sharp, at my house. Agreed?"

"Yes, sir."

"With military punctuality!"

"With military punctuality."

Ortiz then went off, and Manuel was left in the room with the two seamstresses.

La Salvadora, who adopted a very disdainful attitude toward Manuel, seemed to feel offence because he stared at her improved looks with a certain complacency. Enrique, La Salvadora's little brother, was well-developed and very charming; he played with Manuel and told him, in his childish

language, a number of things about his sister and his aunt, as he called La Fea.

After they had had supper, and the child had been put to bed, they visited the room of an embroiderer in the neighbourhood, where Manuel found two old friends of his: Aristas and Aristón.

Aristas had forgotten his gymnastic enthusiasm and had gone into the distribution of newspapers. He scurried over half of Madrid leaving the papers at one place and another. Aristón had taken his position as a supernumerary. In the morning Aristas distributed newspapers, distributed serial issues, distributed prospectuses; in the afternoon he would paste up posters, and at night he would go to the theatre. He was extraordinarily active; he never paused for rest; he organized parties and dances; on Sundays he gave performances with an amateur company; he knew by heart the whole of "Don Juan Tenorio," "El puñal del godo," and other romantic dramas; he had two or three mistresses, and at every hour of the day and night he was talking, speechifying, ordering things about and radiating a wholesome, communicative joy.

Aristón, his necromania somewhat moderated, worked as a fitter in a factory and received good wages. Manuel found it very good to be back again with his friends.

He noticed, or at least thought he noticed, that Aristón was paying court to La Fea and that he was for ever calling her Joaquina, which was her real name. La Fea, finding herself the object of these

attentions, became as a result almost good-looking.

That night Manuel returned to his house on the Calle de Galileo. La Justa had not yet come back. Aristas found work for him in a printery on the Carrera de San Francisco.

## CHAPTER VIII

On The Track of El Bizco—The Outskirts—The Ideal of Jesús

AFTER spending the day at work in the printing shop, Manuel reported at nine in the night at Ortiz's home.

"That's the way I like it," said the chief to him. "With military punctuality."

Ortiz armed himself with a revolver, which he placed in his belt; a stick, which he secured to his wrist with a thong; a rope. To Manuel he gave a cudgel, and they left together.

"Let's make a round of these chop-houses," said the guard to Manuel. "And you keep your eye peeled for El Bizco."

As they walked up the Calle de Arganzuela they struck up a conversation.

Ortiz was a member of the police who was genuinely enamoured of his profession. His father had belonged to the force before him, and the instinct of pursuit flowed as strong in their veins as in the veins of a hunter dog.

According to the tale he told, Ortiz had been a carbineer on the Málaga coast, eternally at war with the smugglers, until he came to Madrid and joined the police department.

"I've done more than any one else of them," he declared, "but they don't promote me because I haven't any pull. It was the same way with my father. He caught more thieves than the whole police department of Madrid put together, but nothing doing. He never advanced beyond the grade of captain. Then they transferred him to the sewer district and he saw to every squabble they had down there. . . . Yet he never carried a revolver or a stick, like me. Only his blunderbuss. He was a soldier, he was."

They happened to be passing a tavern, so they went in, had a glass of wine, and in the meantime Manuel scrutinized the men who were gathered about the tables.

"There's nobody here that you're looking for," said the tavern-keeper to the policeman.

"I see that there isn't, Tío Pepe," answered Ortiz, extracting some coins from his pocket to pay for the drinks.

"My treat," said the man behind the counter.

"Thanks. Good-bye!"

They left the tavern and reached the Plaza de la Cebada.

"Let's go over to the Café de Naranjeros," suggested the captain. "Though it's not likely that our bird is flying thereabouts. Still, often where you least expect. . . ."

They entered the café; there were only a few men chatting with the singers. From the doorway Ortiz shouted in:

"Hey, Tripulante, can I see you for a second?"

A young man who looked as if he came from good family arose and came over to Ortiz.

"Do you know a thug called El Bizco?"

"Yes, I believe I do."

"Does he hang around this district?"

"No, not hereabouts."

"Really?"

"He really doesn't. He must be down below. You can take my word for that."

"I do, man. Why not? Listen, Tripulante," added Ortiz, seizing the youth by the arm. "Watch out, eh? You'll slip, if you don't."

Tripulante burst into laughter, and placing the index finger of his right hand upon his lower eyelash, he whispered:

"On the track! . . . And mum's the word, comrade!"

"Very well. Keep your eyes open just the same, in case he shows up. Remember we know you."

"Leave that to me, señor Ortiz," replied the youth. "I'll keep a sharp watch."

The officer and Manuel left the café.

"He's a slippery article, as clever as any crook. Let's go further down. Perhaps El Tripulante is right."

They reached the Ronda de Toledo. The night was beautiful, atwinkle with stars. Afar, some bonfires lighted the sky. Out of the chimney of the Gas House belched a huge black swirl of smoke, like the powerful exhalation of some monster. They sauntered along the Calle del Gas, which, as if to provide a contrast to its name, was illuminated by

oil-lamps; skirting the Casa Blanca they descended to Las Injurias. They crossed a narrow street and fairly stumbled against the night watchman.

Ortiz told him what mission brought them there; he gave him a description of El Bizco. The sereno, however, informed them that nobody answering to that description was to be found in that vicinity.

"We can make inquiries, if you gentlemen wish."

The three penetrated a narrow passageway that led to a mud-strewn patio.

There was a light in the window of one of the houses, and they drew near to reconnoitre. By the illumination of a candle stub that was placed upon a kitchen shelf they made out a tattered old woman squatting on the floor. At her side, blanketed with rags, slept two boys and a little girl.

They left the patio and walked down an alley.

"There's a family here that I don't know," said the sereno, and he knocked at the door with the tip of his pike. There was a delay in opening.

"Who is it?" asked a woman's voice from within.

"The law," answered Ortiz.

The door was opened by a woman in tatters, with nothing underneath. The watchman walked straight in, followed by Manuel and Ortiz; the place was filled with an atrocious, overpowering stench. Upon a wretched bed improvised out of shreds and paper refuse lay a blind woman. The sereno thrust his pike under the bed.

"You can see for yourselves. He isn't here."

Ortiz and Manuel left the Las Injurias district.

"El Bizco lived over in Las Cambroneras for a time," suggested Manuel.

"Then there isn't much use in looking for him there," replied Ortiz. "But no matter. Heave, ho, my lads! Let's try it, anyway."

They strolled along the Paseo de Yeserías. On both sides of the Toledo Bridge gleamed the gas-lamps; here and there a narrow ribbon of the river sent back reflections from its dark waters. From the direction of Madrid, out of the Gas House chimneys issued red flames like dragons of fire. From the distance came the whistle of a locomotive; along the banks of the Canal the silhouettes of the trees writhed upward into the gloom of the night.

They found the sereno of Las Cambroneras and asked after El Bizco.

"I'll talk tomorrow with Paco el Cañi and find out. Where shall we meet tomorrow?"

"In La Blasa's tavern."

"Fine. I'll be there at three."

They crossed the bridge once more and went into Casa Blanca.

"We'll see the administrator," said Ortiz. They entered a causeway; to one side, they knocked at a place the half-opened door of which showed a chink of light. A man in shirt-sleeves came out.

"Who is it?" he shouted.

Ortiz gave his credentials.

"No such chap is around here," answered the caretaker. "I'm positive as to that; I have every one of my tenants listed in this notebook, and I know them."

Leaving Casa Blanca, Ortiz and Manuel made for Las Peñuelas, where Ortiz had a long conversation with the sereno. Then they visited a number of the taverns in the neighbourhood; the places were filled with customers, though the doors were closed.

As they went through the Calle del Ferrocarril, the sereno pointed out the spot where they had discovered the quartered body of the woman in a sack. Ortiz and the watchman discussed this and other crimes that had been committed in the vicinity, then they separated.

"That watchman is a corker," said Ortiz. "He's cudgelled every bully and thug out of Las Peñuelas."

It was already late when they had left the taverns, and Ortiz thought that they might postpone their hunt to the next day. He remained in the Campillo del Mundo Nuevo and Manuel, tramping across half of Madrid, returned to his house.

Early the next morning he went to work at the printery, but when he told them that he could not come that afternoon, he was discharged.

Manuel went to La Fea's for a bite.

"They've fired me from the printing shop," he announced, upon entering.

"You must have come in late," snapped La Salvadora.

"No. Ortiz told me yesterday that I'd have to go along with him this afternoon; I told them so at the printery and they fired me on the spot."

La Salvadora smiled with sarcastic incredulousness, and Manuel felt his cheeks turning red.

"You needn't believe it if you don't want to, but that's the truth."

"I haven't said a word, have I, man?" retorted La Salvadora, mockingly.

"I know you didn't, but you were laughing at me."

Manuel left La Fea's in a huff, sought out Ortiz, and together they made their way to Las Injurias.

It was a mild afternoon and the sun was glorious. They took chairs just outside La Blasa's tavern. In a lane opposite to them the men were sprawling in the doorways of their houses; the women, with their ragged skirts gathered about them, were skipping from one side to the other, their feet splashing in the stinking sewage that ran like a black stream through the middle of the street. Here and there a woman had a cigarette in her mouth. Big grey rats darted about over the mud, pursued by a number of gamins with sticks and stones.

Ortiz exchanged a few words with the proprietress of the resort and shortly afterward the sereno of the Cambroneras district appeared. He saluted Ortiz, they drained a few glasses, and then the sereno said:

"I had a talk with Paco el Cañí. He knows El Bizco. He says the fellow's not hereabouts. He believes he must be in La Manigua, or California, or some place of the sort."

"Quite possible. Very well, gentlemen, see you later." And Ortiz got up, followed by Manuel. They walked up to the square at the Toledo Bridge, crossed over the Manzanares river and set out on

the Andalucía cart-road. A few days before, Manuel had gone there for lunch with Vidal and Calatrava. There were the same gangs of thugs in the doorways of the restaurants; some knew Ortiz and invited him to a glass.

They reached a district bordering the river,—a heap of wretched hovels, without chimneys, without windows, with wattled roofs. Clouds of mosquitos hovered above the grass on the banks.

"This is El Tejar de Mata Pobre," said Ortiz.

These miserable shacks housed some ragpickers and their families. All the denizens of the poverty-ridden settlement,—a dirty, yellowish crew they made,—were consumed by fevers, whose germs thrived in the black, muddy waters of the river. Nobody there had ever heard of El Bizco. Manuel and Ortiz went on. At a short distance from this spot appeared another, upon a rise in the ground, composed of huts and their poultry-yards.

"The Tinsmiths' quarter,—that's what this is called," informed Ortiz.

It was like a village reared upon dung and straw. Each of the houses, built of all manner of débris and offal, had its yard, delimited by fences made of old, rusty cans flattened out and nailed against posts. Here, urban poverty blended with the poverty of the country; upon the ground of the yards the old baskets and the card-board hat boxes rubbed against the notched sickle and the rake. Some of the houses gave the impression of relative comfort; these had a look of industriousness about them. Heaps of

straw were piled up in their yards and hens scratched the soil.

Ortiz approached a man who was repairing a cart.

"Listen, friend. Do you happen to know a chap named El Bizco? A red, ugly. . . ."

"Are you from the police?" asked the man.

"No. Oh, no, sir."

"Well, you look as if you were. But that's your affair. I don't know this Bizco," and the man turned his back upon them.

"We've got to have a care around here," whispered Ortiz. "If they ever find out what we've come for, we'll get a drubbing that we'll remember."

They left the Tinsmiths' quarter, crossed the river by a bridge over which the railroad ran, and continued along the banks of the Manzanares.

On the meadows by the stream, which were dazzling with verdure, the cows were at pasture. Some ragged figures were walking slowly, cautiously along, hunting crickets.

Manuel and Ortiz reached some country houses called La China; the officer made inquiries of a gardener. The man did not know El Bizco.

Leaving this place, they sat down upon the grass to rest. It was growing dark; Madrid, a reddish yellow, with its spires and domes, aglow with the last quivering rays of the setting sun, rose out of the distance. The glass panes of the Observatory flashed flame. A huge ball of copper, on the top of some edifice, beamed like a sun over the grimy roofs; here and there a star was already shining in

the Prussian blue arch of heaven; the Guadarrama range, dark violet in the dusk, broke the distant horizon with its whitish peaks.

Ortiz and Manuel hastened back to the city. By the time they had reached the Paseo de Embajadores, it was night; they had a glass at the Manigua restaurant and kept their eyes open in the meantime.

"Have supper with me," suggested Ortiz. "Tonight we'll resume the hunt. We've got to ransack all Madrid."

Manuel had supper with the officer and his family in the house at El Campillo del Mundo Nuevo. Thereupon they visited nearly every tavern on the Calle del Mesón de Paredes and the Calle de Embajadores, afterward going into the little café on the Calle de la Esgrima. The whole place was thronged with vagabonds; as the officer and Manuel took their seats, the news was quickly spread from one customer to the other. A boy who sat at a nearby table showing a ring and a comb made haste to conceal them as soon as he caught sight of Ortiz. The officer noticed this move and called to the boy.

"What do you want?" asked the youngster, suspiciously.

"I want to ask you something."

"Speak up, then."

"Do you know a chap called El Bizco?"

"No, sir."

Ortiz then asked the youth a number of other

questions; he must have been convinced that the boy did not know El Bizco, for he muttered:

"Nobody knows where he is."

They went into one tavern after the other. As they were walking through the Calle del Amparo, Ortiz made up his mind to search a lodging house that had a red lantern hanging from one of its balconies.

They went in and climbed a plank stairway with wobbly steps, lit by a lantern embedded in a wall. On the first floor were rooms for assignations; on the second was the public dormitory. Ortiz pulled the bell wire and a repulsive hag answered the summons with a candle in her hand, a white kerchief on her head and in battered shoes; this was the woman in charge.

"We belong to the police and we want to look this place over. With your kind permission, we'll step in."

The woman shrugged her shoulders and made way for them to enter.

They passed through a short corridor which ended in a long, narrow room, with low wooden platforms on either side and two rows of beds. Over the centre hung an oil-lamp that hardly illuminated the spacious hall. The floor, which was of brick, twisted to one side.

Ortiz asked for the candle and went along the row of beds, shedding its light upon each successive face.

Some were snoring outrageously; others, still

awake, permitted themselves to be peered at. The bedsheets revealed bare shoulders, herculean chests, the sunken thorax of sickly folk. . . .

"Is there anybody downstairs?" asked Ortiz of the matron.

"Not on the first floor. There must be somebody in the rooms off the vestibule."

They went down to the entrance. A door led to a damp cellar. In a corner lay a beggar asleep in his shreds and patches.

On the day following this expedition, Manuel, returning in the afternoon to La Fea's, found Jesús sitting down and chatting with his sister and La Salvadora.

At sight of him Manuel was overcome by a certain emotion. The lad was still very weak and pale. The two youths examined each other closely, and chatted about the life they had led since their last meeting. Then they passed to present affairs, and Manuel explained his situation and the duties that bound him to Ortiz.

"Yes, I know. They've told me all about it already," said Jesús. "But I refused to believe it. So they led you go free on condition that you'd help capture El Bizco? And you agreed?"

"Yes. If I hadn't they'd have kept me locked up. What was I to do?"

"Refuse."

"And rot in prison?"

"And rot in prison, rather than play a friend such a scurvy trick."

"El Bizco is no friend of mine."

"But he was, from what you say. . . ."

"Friend? No. . . ."

"Then a comrade in your loafing days."

"Yes."

"So you've become a member of the police?"

"Man! . . . Besides, the victim was my cousin, remember."

"A fine man you are for anybody to rely on!" added the compositor sarcastically.

Manuel was silent. He believed that he had done ill to purchase his freedom at such a price. El Bizco was a bandit; but the fellow had never done him any harm. That was true.

"The worst of it is, I can't turn back," said Manuel. "Nor can I escape, for that Ortiz would come here and it would be just like him to take off your sister and La Salvadora to prison."

"Why?"

"Because they told him they'd be responsible for me."

"Bah, that's easy to get around! They tell him that you were here; that they warned you not to forget to do the same as on other days, and that that's all they know. That's all."

"What do you think of the plan?" asked Manuel of La Fea, vacillating.

"Do as you please. I think Jesús must know what he's talking about, and I don't think they can do anything to us."

"There's another thing," added Manuel. "I can't live for a very long time in hiding. I'll have

to work so as to get food, and they'll catch me."

"I'll take you to a printing shop I know," answered Jesús.

"But they might suspect. No, no."

"Then you prefer to be an informer?"

"There's one thing I'm going to do right away: I'm going this very moment to see somebody who can fix the whole business."

"Wait a minute."

"No, no. Let me alone."

Manuel left with the resolution to speak with the Cripple and the Master. He hurried over to the Círculo. He was admitted, ran to the first flight, and said to the man who was stationed at the door to the gambling room:

"The Master? Is he in his office?"

"No, Don Marcos is there."

Manuel knocked at the door and walked in. Calatrava was at a desk together with an employee, counting white and red chips. At sight of Manuel, Marcos turned an icy stare upon him.

"What have you come here for? Squealer!" he cried. "You're not wanted here."

"I know that."

"You're fired. And you needn't expect any back pay, either."

"No. I don't."

"Then what do you want?"

"I'll tell you. El Garro, your police friend, let me go free on condition that I'd help in the capture of the man who killed Vidal, and they keep me going and coming at all hours of the day and night. I'm

sick and tired of it all, and I don't want to become a stool-pigeon."

"Well, what has all this got to do with me?"

"What's more, if I don't show up at the house of the captain under whose order El Garro placed me, they'll arrest me and take me off to jail."

"Good enough. You'll learn there not to wag your tongue so freely."

"Not a bit of it. What I'll do there is tell them just how folks are cheated in this establishment. . . ."

"You're crazy. You're sucking around for a couple of drubbings."

"No. I want you to tell El Garro that I don't care to be chasing El Bizco around. What's more, I want you to tell him to quit hounding me. Now you know just what to do."

"What I'm going to do is give you a couple of kicks this very minute, you informer!"

"We'll see about that."

The Cripple lurched over to Manuel with his closed fist and aimed a blow at him; but Manuel was agile enough to seize him by the arm, shove him backwards, make him lose his balance and send him falling across the table, which was overturned with a formidable crash. Calatrava regained his feet; he was in a fury and made for Manuel once more; but the noise had brought some men, who separated them. It was at this juncture that the Master appeared in the doorway of the office.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, eyeing Calatrava and Manuel severely. "You fellows get out of

here," he ordered, turning to the spectators.

The three were left alone, and Manuel explained the reason of the squabble.

The Master, after hearing the story, turned to Calatrava.

"Is all this he's been telling you true?"

"Yes. But he came here with demands and threats. . . ."

"Very well. We won't discuss that." Then addressing himself to Manuel. "So you don't want to help the police? You're right. You may go. I'll tell El Garro not to bother you."

An hour later, Manuel and Jesús had left the house for a walk. It was a stifling hot night; they went towards the Ronda.

They chatted. Manuel was filled with a gnawing irritation against the whole world,—a hatred that up to then had lain dormant was now awaking in his soul against society, against mankind. . . .

"Let me tell you," he concluded, "and I mean it. I wish it would rain dynamite for a whole week and that then the Eternal Father himself would fall from heaven, a heap of ashes."

In his fury he invoked every destructive power, that this miserable society of ours might be reduced to a mound of smouldering ruins.

Jesús listened attentively to his diatribe.

"You're an anarchist," he said.

"I?"

"Yes. I'm one, too."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"Ever since I've seen the infamies committed in the world; ever since I've seen how coldly a piece of humanity is given over to death; ever since I've seen how men die friendless on the streets and in the hospital," answered Jesús with a certain solemnity.

Manuel was silent. Mutely the two friends sauntered along the Ronda de Segovia, selecting a bench in the gardens of La Virgen del Puerto.

The heavens over them were studded with stars; the milky way lay white across the immense blue vault. The geometric figure of the Great Bear shone high up in the sky. Arcturus and Vega glowed softly in that ocean of planets.

Far off, the dark fields, furrowed by lines of lights, looked like the water of a harbour; the rows of lights seemed like the piers of a wharf.

The damp, warm air was saturated with the scents of wild plants—odours set free by the heat.

"How many stars!" exclaimed Manuel. "What can they be?"

"They're worlds and worlds without end."

"I don't know why it soothes me so to see the sky so beautiful. Listen, Jesús. Do you believe that there are people in those worlds yonder?" asked Manuel.

"Perhaps. Why not?"

"And prisons, too, judges, gambling houses and police? . . . Hey? Do you?"

Jesús did not answer the question. Then, in a calm voice he spoke of a vision of an idyllic human-

ity,—a sweet, pious, noble and childishly simple vision.

In this dream, Man, guided by a new idea, attained to a superior state.

No more hatred, no more rancour. No more judges, nor policemen, nor soldiers, nor authority, nor fatherland. In the vast prairies of the world, free men laboured in the sunlight. The law of love has supplanted the law of duty, and the horizon of humanity becomes ever wider, ever a softer blue. . . .

And Jesús continued speaking of a vague ideal of love and justice, of industry and piety. These words of his, chaotic, incoherent as they were, fell like a solacing balm upon Manuel's lacerated heart. . . . Then the two lapsed into a long silence, immersed in their own thoughts, contemplating the night.

The heavens were aglow with an august beatitude, and the vague sensation of the immensity of space, the infinitude of these imponderable worlds, spread a delicious tranquillity over their hearts. . . .

THE END

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